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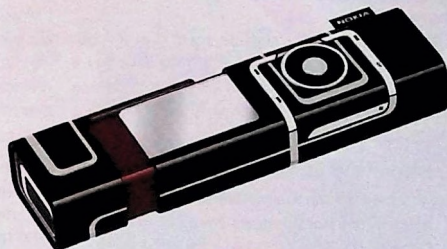
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In selected regions ... and online

Not all stories run in all regions due to space constraints. Check our online archives for the full index of stories across all regions at www.hubcanada.com

- Upgrading brand name PCs
- Summer Blockbusters 101
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- DV, or not DV



Editorial



Anyone who travels any appreciable amount on business knows the value of packing light. The colossal rolling closets vacationers haul around the airport are of little use to the business traveler. Rather, carry-on

sized rolling suitcases and a laptop bag or similar are the order of the day.

Experienced business travelers are often the first ones standing after the airplane's seat belt light is turned off ... the more eager among them perhaps even before. The cell phone comes out as soon as it's declared OK, and, suitcase in tow, the business traveler races past baggage claim, required traveling documents in hand to get ahead in the airport rat race. First one to a cab (or airport limo) wins. Bonus points if you managed to grab a coffee in the process and haven't yet spilled it on your white shirt.

Business users are a major driving force behind the shrinking and converging of the devices that make up the daily landscape: Cell phones that are part PDA, part data device and a link back to the office, email and instant messenger programs. PDAs that shrink and grow according to the user's needs - sub-laptop size to tiny "smart phone" size. Laptops that fulfill their primary purposes well but that are also used as in-flight and in-room entertainment, playing music and DVD movies.

The road warrior wants devices that are small, lightweight, powerful and easy to use, and that offer long battery life - the fewer cords, plugs and power bricks required the better.

The sticking point often seems to come with the last criterion; the battery is too often the major failing of a portable device. Even with recent advances in battery technology and energy conservation, there are still a

wealth of laptops that have a hard time offering more than a few hours away from a power outlet. Likewise, as PDA devices try to do more, incorporating faster processors, brighter colour screens, movie playing, WiFi and cell phone capabilities, battery life drops off sharply.

If micro fuel cell technology manages to catch on, some of the immediate problems will be solved; methanol fuel cells would be relatively inexpensive to produce and would be readily available to power the myriad devices that travel with us every day. Getting one onto a plane however might not be a simple or indeed a possible task.

Until a better solution becomes available, can't we at least ask that everything that can possibly be charged via USB do so? It just makes sense: one laptop, one power supply, a bunch of devices and a few USB charging cables to keep the weight down. The first devices I pack when traveling are those that meet this one relatively simple requirement.

Enjoy the issue,
Andrew Moore-Crispin
Editor-In-Chief

Conrad Lew writes: I enjoyed your article on NAS and the Stingray hardware firewall in the April issue. I'm currently contemplating ways to create a robust network at home that is kid proof. With 2 kids in a net-centric household, viruses and spyware are a constant threat to the home office network. It would be nice to see solutions that provide anti-virus, anti-spyware, anti-spam protection at the router level and then layer a second level of protection on the PC.

I have looked at hardware by Sonicwall, Watchguard etc. but their subscription pricing on everything including firmware update and node limitations are too restrictive. Especially when you might have friends over for a LAN party.

Letter of the Month

Last month we asked: How networked is your home? Our Letter of the Month comes from Anton Kobelev who writes:

My home is not wired at all, at least my room is not. I live in the residence and both of my neighbours have wireless routers. Both of them have laptops and hate wires clutter. Neither of them password-protect their networks so for the first half of the year, I could easily connect to either network with no trouble.

At last, my conscience woke up and I decided to offer one of them a share of the monthly fee for his internet connection. Nothing has changed since then, besides \$10 out my pocket every month.

He still has all the equipment in his room and I just connect to it whenever I need to spool email. A Wireless solution without a router!!!

For his letter, Anton wins a retail copy of McAfee VirusScan 2005. Congratulations Anton.

This month, in addition to general feedback on the issue, we're asking for your thoughts on our question of the month. In light of our upcoming Interactive Entertainment, post-Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) issue, we want to hear your opinion on our question of the month. Which is better, console, PC or handheld gaming? Whatever your opinion, we want to hear from you. Send your thoughts to: letters@ppublishing.ca

The Letter of the Month will win a retail copy of McAfee Internet Security Suite 2005. McAfee's Internet Security Suite includes VirusScan, Personal Firewall Plus and SpamKiller, and helps block spyware and protects against identity theft. www.mcafee.com.



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DIGITAL LIVING

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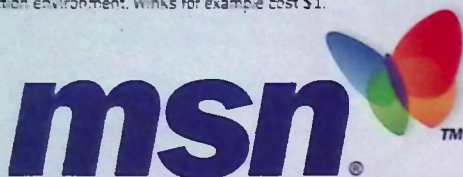
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According to MSN's own data, 10.3 million Canadians use MSN Messenger for an average 45 minutes per day. In order to keep the trend in high gear, MSN Canada (sympatico.msn.ca) recently announced updates and improvements to its MSN Messenger service, incorporating a blogging interface called MSN Spaces that gives users access to standard online diary-keeping features along with some extras like posting Windows Media Player 10 playlists. The Messenger client itself has also had some tweaks, including animated "winks" that play a short and expressive animation on both users' screens only when the chat window is active, attention-getting "nudges" that shake the message window, Media Player integration that must be activated to display hyperlinked text of what users are listening to at that moment in Microsoft's player, and integration with the company's revamped, much improved and localized MSN Search (search.sympatico.msn.ca). Users are encouraged to whip out their credit cards in order to purchase MSN theme packs, new winks, emotions and the like in a micro transaction environment. Winks for example cost \$1.



MSN Messenger update



Samsung (www.samsung.ca) launched its latest LCD innovation called MagicColor Engine alongside the biggest LCD display currently available in Canada. The 460P is a 46-inch behemoth offering an 8ms response time. MagicColor is the brand name of a Samsung-developed exclusive image processing technology engine currently

found in four of Samsung's recently released LCD monitors: the 730B, 930B, 920T and 193P. "We're not limiting it to our higher-end monitors; by the second half of this year, every Samsung monitor will have the MagicColor chipset inside," says Bob Park, IT channel marketing manager for Samsung Electronics Canada.

Park says the MagicColor Engine won't add to the retail cost of Samsung monitors, and is intended as a value added component to make Samsung's monitors stand out with the company's ASE (Adaptive Saturation Enhancement), which adjusts the saturation of reds, greens and blues displayed on a MagicColor-equipped monitor and optimizes them to appear natural to the human eye. According to Andrew Chun, manager of IT product marketing, the RGB colours are altered and can be customized to individual preferences while leaving skin tones intact. Users select from four modes: without image optimization, demo mode where the screen is divided to demonstrate the appreciable difference between two halves displaying the image with MagicColor turned on and off, MagicColor 1 for enhancing colour except in the skin tones, and MagicColor 2 for full colour enhancement including skin tones.

"We spend hours and hours a day, probably the same amount of time [we spend sleeping] looking at a monitor. We spend time surfing Web sites, we spend time watching videos, downloading pictures. You



The Oxy Nickel Hydride composition of Panasonic's new Oxyride batteries gives them a higher initial voltage as compared to Nickel Metal Hydrides, which translates into more power for electronic devices. According to Panasonic (www.panasonic.ca), this means that LCD screens and flashlights will be brighter, remote control cars will go 25 per cent faster, and MP3 players will run for 20 per cent longer.

Panasonic unveiled the batteries during its Ideas for Life show in Toronto, where journalists were treated to a demonstration in which a 40-pound car was powered around a warehouse running on nothing but two Oxyride AA's.

Oxyrides seem to cause the most dramatic performance improvements in digital cameras. During independent lab testing, it was found that Oxyride-powered cameras shot faster, had significantly faster flash recovery time (seven seconds vs. 14) and took up to twice as many pictures as cameras powered by traditional Alkaline batteries. Oxyride batteries will be available in June.

Oxyride Extreme Power batteries

should be seeing the best possible image, the most realistic picture and that's what MagicColor does. It brings a little extra colour, a little extra vividness and a little extra quality to each image."



Samsung MagicColor

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Test Lab: Camera phones

From curiosity to burgeoning social trend to standard equipment, camera-equipped cell phones' relatively short ride thus far has happened at an accelerated pace.

While they're still not ready for their supposed prime time, competing with stand-alone point-and-shoot digital cameras, they've certainly made a lot of progress fast. Whether or not camera phones will ever in fact compete in the same space as consumer digicams is something of a contested issue in itself.

The inferior optics and generic image capture planes found in a camera-equipped cell phone are understandable; the cell phone market is a very price-competitive one and the handsets themselves are often subsidized by service providers in exchange for a hefty commitment in the form of a one-, two- or even three-year contract requirement. However understandable these shortcomings may be, relatively poor quality images aren't acceptable when trying to document family life, a special event or trip.

Similarly, while flash-equipped camera phones are readily available — two of the models in our roundup are so equipped — the flashes aren't the xenon gas flash tubes found in point-and-shoot cameras. Rather, in order to conserve battery life and keep the size down, they use bright LEDs that are good for illuminating the area in front of the lens but insufficient when any distance is introduced.

Camera-equipped cell phones aren't the novelty they were even recently. Their uses are many and while they won't replace standard point-and-shoot digicams any time soon [if at all], they're perfect for snapping quick and dirty photographs and provide a more visual means of communication beyond talk and text.

LG 535

The LG 535's bag of tricks is deeper than others in this roundup. It incorporates a 1.3 megapixel camera and LED flash while maintaining a fairly small footprint. The face of the phone is relatively free of button clutter while still allowing users access to some functions, including picture taking. The number pad is hidden under the screen / earpiece section that slides about half way up the handset, revealing the mouthpiece. In addition, the phone packs in an MP3 player that, while initially confusing to navigate, can play selections from an optional Mini SD card inserted into a slot on the top of the device. However, with no apparent means for PC connectivity, music transfer to SD card must occur outside the phone. Users



can listen through a compatible headset or through the device's own speaker with surprising volume and clarity, which is perfect if yelling into the phone on the morning commute isn't quite annoying enough for others around — or for other, more legitimate uses like having your own walking music.

Not surprisingly owing to its higher than the average resolution, the pictures the LG 535 generates are of the highest overall image quality in our tests. At 1.3-megapixel and with sub-par optics [relative to point and shoot] however, the LG 535 is nowhere near ready to replace even entry-level digital cameras. The lens is also positioned in such a way that it's right where the index finger seems to naturally come to rest [or at least where my index finger comes to rest] making things a little awkward. A few of the test shots taken with the LG 535 accidentally had my finger showing at the bottom of the picture. Fifteen-second video clips can also be captured.

Real estate agents and the like may enjoy the convenience of carrying one device that is both a phone and camera. For this use specifically, the 535 is well suited. The pictures it takes aren't suitable for printing even a four-by-six with any quality, however for printed pages like a real estate agent's house fact sheet complete with small pics, it is ideal.

Info Box

LG 535

Estimated price: \$220 - \$400 (depending on service provider rates)	
Weight: 110g (3.9 oz)	Dimensions: 110 x 45 x 15 mm
Model: LG-FD320 (Canada), LG-FD320 (USA), LG-FD320 (UK), LG-FD320 (Australia)	
Camera resolution: 1.3 megapixel	Maximum image quality: 1500 x 1000
Display: 262,144 colors	Flash: LED
Screen size: 2.2 inches	Secondary screen size: 1.2 inches
Picture storage: 100 pictures and 100 video clips	Digital sig. strength: 128/128

Price: \$220 - \$400	Color: Silver
Available from: Best Buy, Circuit City, Radio Shack, etc.	Available from: Best Buy, Circuit City, Radio Shack, etc.
Warranty: 1 year	Warranty: 1 year

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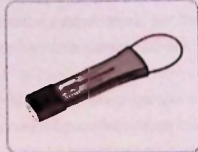


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APRIL PHOTO SPREE WINNER

THE WINNER:

Congratulations to **Marian Hashimoto** of Richmond, British Columbia whose image was selected from among the great shots submitted for the April "Spring is in the Air"-themed Photo Spree contest.

"Tulipland" was captured using a Canon EOS-10D and was tweaked in Adobe Photoshop Elements 2.

For submitting the winning image, Marian wins the Lexmark P315 Snapshot portable photo printer for great quality 4" x 6" image printing at home or on the road.

We received some excellent submissions and were once again faced with a difficult decision in picking a winner.

The Photo Spree contest is on a brief hiatus but stay tuned next month for all new prizeing, and a new challenge.



LEXMARK



Transferring pictures, however, requires that they either be sent from the phone as data or copied to a Mini SD card and transferred directly.

**Zoom function only available in 640x480 and lower resolution.

Samsung SPH-a680



The Samsung SPH-a680 is a service provider's dream come true. Once pictures are taken, the only ways for users to get them off is to send them via email (hence incurring data charges), send as an MMS (multimedia message service) message, or upload them to the Web, again with data charges. The phone offers neither direct to PC, Bluetooth or infrared connection, which is a negative point for anyone looking to pull pictures or video clips off the phone to share around without charge. For mobile bloggers and those used to sending pictures back and forth, or for those with an unlimited data service plan, it's not likely to be a big issue.

The connection limitations are a shame, given that the a680 is a relatively inexpensive phone and one that is being actively promoted by service providers tied to a service contract, making it accessible to a larger group of potential users.

The SPH-a680 offers some of the most fun modes of the camera phones tested. Users can snap

photos using more than a dozen "fun frames" such as a football helmet or Afro hairdo surrounding the subject's face. While shots using these frames are further reduced in size from the 640x480 maximum resolution, they're fun to play around with and they make the ultimate instant messaging icons, if users are inclined to pull them off the phone.

The phone is also video-ready and can record short clips of up to 15 seconds, and has the neat added feature of a "video light" — a fairly bright LED behind a diffusing filter that lights the scene a few feet in front of the

lens. This light can also be triggered in bursts while in camera mode and lights the scene before capture, which makes catching darker scenes easier.

If you give someone a camera phone to play with, it's a safe bet that the first picture that person takes will be a self-portrait. There's a good chance that many subsequent pictures will be of the same ilk. While some other manufacturers place a self-portrait mirror beside the lens, the SPH-a680 takes it a step further. When in camera mode, the second display will show a camera icon. However, if the clamshell phone is closed in camera mode, the second display will show an image of what the camera is seeing, allowing for much easier self-portraiture. While this feature isn't unique in this roundup, the second screen seems to be of the highest quality, and as such shows a better picture and is generally more usable.

Nokia 6620

While the 6620's odd shape may not be everyone's cup of tea, its pictures show up the best of any in our roundup on the device's own screen. Practically speaking, that's where pictures will be viewed most of the time.

Pictures can be transferred to a PC or other device using either infrared or Bluetooth connections, or can be sent as data. A proprietary connection to USB cable comes in the box allowing for direct connection and has an MMC (multimedia card) slot under the battery, making the 6620 the most versatile of the phones tested where connection is concerned.

Users also have the ability to record video clips of up to 10 minutes at 176x144 or 128x96 pixels that can be saved or sent using the same methods as described above.

When pictures are pulled or sent from the 6620 they still look decent if printed at their native resolution, optimized to view on the page as opposed to on screen. When compared with other camera phones in the roundup, the pictures actually come out the best



Info Box

Samsung SPH-a680

www.samsung.ca

Estimated price: \$170 - \$400, depending on service provider model

Weight: 110 g Dimensions: 110x50x20 mm

Make: 2006, 2nd quarter, 2nd half, 2nd quarter, 2nd half, 2nd quarter, 2nd half

Resolution: 640x480 Camera resolution: 2.0MP

Relative image quality: 100% Signal: 100% Screen size: 128x160 pixels

Flash: LED Secondary screen size: 128x160 pixels

Signal: 100% / standby: 100% / 100%

Pros:

- Fun frames
- Video light
- Camera flash / video light

Cons:

- No direct transfer
- Photo quality not great (except on video)
- No video (except on video)

Info Box

Nokia 6620

www.nokia.com

Estimated price: \$170 - \$400, depending on service provider model

Weight: 110 g Dimensions: 110x50x20 mm

Make: 2006, 2nd quarter, 2nd half, 2nd quarter, 2nd half, 2nd quarter, 2nd half

Resolution: 640x480 Camera resolution: 2.0MP

Relative image quality: 100% Signal: 100% Screen size: 128x160 pixels

Flash: LED Secondary screen size: 128x160 pixels

Signal: 100% / standby: 100% / 100%

Pros:

- Excellent video quality
- Excellent camera quality
- Good screen

Cons:

- Unusable camera quality
- Unusable camera quality
- Unusable camera quality

when judged independent of overall resolution. The 6620 produces colours that are fairly rich and true and avoids much of the digital noise that plagues other low resolution cameras.

Cramming a fairly large screen into a one-piece cell phone design is a questionable decision however. The screen is exposed and is likely to get scratched up if kept in a pocket. Also, in keeping the size down – the 6620 is about as long as a standard one piece cell phone handset but noticeably wider – the numeric keypad is crammed into a tiny space at the bottom of the phone.

Motorola Razr V3

Easily the most stylish of any of the phones tested, the Razr V3 holds its own in the camera-equipped phone category without difficulty.

While it is wider than most other clamshell phones, the V3 is about as thin as they come. Also, as a clamshell, the large main screen and keypad are well-protected if the phone is stored in a pocket as opposed to in the included leather belt clip. The smaller second screen and camera lens aren't so fortunate, however.

The second screen seems to be of low quality, especially when compared to the nice, bright main screen. While it does display the image captured by the lens when the phone is closed in camera mode, making it easier to take self-portraits, the general graininess and dimness make things a little more difficult than with other phones, especially in low-light situations.

On the main screen, pictures show up well and within reason, and low light doesn't present a problem when viewing through the camera lens. The V3's bright main screen is the biggest of any of the phones submitted, and is best suited to showing off pictures captured with the device.

With onboard Bluetooth, users can connect with other Bluetooth-enabled devices to pull pictures stored in the phone's own memory. Connecting with other phones, a Pocket PC and a laptop PC via Bluetooth adapter was a simple process. The V3 has the added security benefit of requiring users to make the phone "visible" to other Bluetooth devices. Choosing to do so makes the phone discoverable for a period of 60 seconds as opposed to the always-on or always-off options more often seen. Once a device is "paired" with the V3, the phone is always visible to it, whether broadcasting or not.

The numeric keypad, menu and directional keys take some getting used to since they don't travel as far as other phones and because there are few tactile reference points. This is especially true of the directional buttons at the top of the phone. Big hands will have a hard time not pushing the surrounding keys when trying to navigate with the directional pad.

While the phone has a USB connector on the left hand side, it is currently only useful for charging the phone; no software drivers for PCs have yet been released and no plans for such drivers have been formally announced.

Pictures captured in direct light tend to take on a strange and very noticeable red caste, whether under indoor or outdoor light.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

*From manufacturer's own best-case specs.

Info Box

Motorola Razr V3

www.motorola.com

Estimated price: \$220 - \$240 depending on options (includes taxes)

Weight: 10.5 g Dimensions: 10.5 x 4.5 x 0.13 in

Model: V300 (also sold as V300C, V300G, V300S, V300T, V300U, V300V, V300W, V300X, V300Y, V300Z, V300AA, V300AB, V300AC, V300AD, V300AE, V300AF, V300AG, V300AH, V300AI, V300AJ, V300AK, V300AL, V300AM, V300AN, V300AO, V300AP, V300AQ, V300AR, V300AS, V300AT, V300AU, V300AV, V300AW, V300AX, V300AY, V300AZ, V300BA, V300BB, V300BC, V300BD, V300BE, V300BF, V300BG, V300BH, V300BI, V300BJ, V300BK, V300BL, V300BM, V300BN, V300BO, V300BP, V300BQ, V300BR, V300BS, V300BT, V300BU, V300BV, V300BW, V300BX, V300BY, V300BZ, V300CA, V300CB, V300CC, V300CD, V300CE, V300CF, V300CG, V300CH, V300CI, V300CJ, V300CK, V300CL, V300CM, V300CN, V300CO, V300CP, V300CQ, V300CR, V300CS, V300CT, V300CU, V300CV, V300CW, V300CX, V300CY, V300CZ, V300DA, V300DB, V300DC, V300DD, V300DE, V300DF, V300DG, V300DH, V300DI, V300DJ, V300DK, V300DL, V300DM, V300DN, V300DO, V300DP, V300DQ, V300DR, V300DS, V300DT, V300DU, V300DV, V300DW, V300DX, V300DY, V300DZ, V300EA, V300EB, V300EC, V300ED, V300EE, V300EF, V300EG, V300EH, V300EI, 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Pros:

- Excellent
- Excellent screen
- Great V3

Cons:

- Small screen
- No camera
- Storage space not expandable



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An evening with a master portraitist

Al Gilbert addresses the PPOC convention

"You spend one minute with me and I'll pick out the best angle, the right lens and the right lighting." Al Gilbert is addressing a friendly crowd – members of the Professional Photographers of Canada at their annual convention called Impact 2005 in downtown Calgary. It's the organization the master portrait photographer helped establish in 1970.

"If I had to tell you of only one item that's made me successful, it's facial analysis," he says, and tonight he's revealing a little of what he's learned about it. "You're painting with light. You're picking out the right angle, and eliminating anything that's not going to work for you."

A couple of dramatic slide sequences bring the point home. In one, Gilbert shows three shots of Bill Clinton taken from Clinton's televised debates with Senator Dole. In one shot, one of Clinton's eyes looks smaller than the other. "When he turned his head to the right, the eye looked almost closed, but when he turned his head to the left, both eyes looked normal," says Gilbert. "I couldn't wait to send him a letter and say, 'if you don't start looking the other way, you're not going to be president.'" For the punch line, Gilbert shows a picture of the letter that he received back from Clinton thanking him and then comments, "and in his State of the Union address he was looking the other way."

He shows some unflattering stills of George W. Bush, where his eyes are deeply shadowed. "Where the hell are his people? They should know that if the man has deep set eyes and you bring the lights in from the top, there are no eyes."

A series of studio shots demonstrates another point about facial analysis:

the human face is not symmetrical, and choosing which side to place the primary lighting on is an important key to a successful portrait. He shows three images, one of a normal face, one created from two left sides, and the third created from two right sides (by flipping the image so that right becomes left, splitting the image in half and then combining the left or right of the original with the flipped left or right of the copy to create a complete face). In one of the composites, the face shows a smile, but in the other, there's a distinct sinister gaze.

Facial analysis may be the primary substance in Gilbert's work, but the application of specific techniques is what has given his portraits their unique style. Take lens choices. Pick up any book on photography and you'll be told that a medium telephoto is the "ideal" lens for portraiture. Don't use a wide angle, you'll be told, because it has an unflattering influence on facial features. It's a good thing Al Gilbert didn't heed that advice, because some of his most distinctive portraits are made not only with wide angle, but also with fish-eye lenses. It's a signature style.

After seeing photos of politicians and other figures photographed against a backdrop that communicated something about their occupation – the prime minister framed by the Parliament Buildings, for example – Gilbert says he was inspired "to marry the individual with the background. That got me into wide-angle portraiture. Once I came up with that style I was off to the races."

Al Gilbert's talk was called "The history of photography from glass plates to digital" and part of it was a retrospective look at the Gilbert studio in Toronto that was founded by his father. He showed the camera his father used – wooden construction, a brass lens cap that he removed and replaced for exposure since the camera had no shutter, and glass plates. He said his father used only window light, and later in his own career Gilbert said he rediscovered window light, and recreating that type of lighting became another signature characteristic of his portrait style.

As for his move to digital, Gilbert said around four years ago he received a call from his son, also a photographer, who told him that if he didn't get into digital he'd go bankrupt. "I'm the only photographer that's worked in photography from the time of glass plates to digital," he says with some satisfaction.

The studio has embraced digital, but Gilbert reminisces about pre-digital days. Back then, he developed a couple of unusual techniques to throw the background out of focus, thereby enhancing his portraits. After describing them in some detail, he concludes: "Isn't it funny that it took me four years to learn all these damn things and now I can do them within Photoshop."

By David Tanaka



Far left: Al Gilbert used an Olympus E-1 to take this portrait of Ann Monteith, president of the Professional Photographers of America, during the Impact 2005 convention.

Left: Al Gilbert answers questions during the Impact 2005 convention.

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The First Frame

The digital shape of things to come

Three major photography trade shows have run in the past six months: the bi-annual Photokina in Germany last fall, the Photo Marketing Association show in Orlando in February, and the Photo Imaging Expo (or PIE) Tokyo in March. There have been a few interesting developments, so as a change of pace this month, rather than a tutorial-style column we'll look at some products coming your way.

For megapixel freaks, the buzz at PIE had to be Pentax's unveiling of its medium format digital, the 645 Digital. The 18 megapixel camera is the logical next step for Pentax's illustrious 645 line, which it launched in 1994. The digital version will be compatible with the existing interchangeable lenses that have been developed for the 645. This camera is supposed to be ready for market in 2006. Price? It's hard to speculate. The film-based Pentax 645NII currently sells for around \$3,300 while Phase One digital backs for medium format cameras sell for \$16,000 and up, so the 645 would likely fall somewhere in between. My guess would be around \$12,000, a reasonable jump from the high-end 35mm-based DSLRs like the Nikon D2X (\$6,000) and Canon EOS 1DS (\$9,500). But before you take out a second mortgage, an article in the British Journal of Photography suggests that the 645D is still a concept that Pentax is gauging support for before it actually commits to a production run.



Pentax Optio S5n

Easy Adobe Photoshop Elements 3

By Nick Butler

Published by New Publishing, 2005 ISBN 0-7657-3328-7

Paperback, 242 pages, includes CD Price: \$29.95

Photoshop Elements 3 is a software package for editing and enhancing digital images. It is a very easy-to-use program that allows you to make changes to your images without the need for a complex interface. The book is a step-by-step guide to the program, covering everything from basic editing to advanced techniques. It includes a CD-ROM with all the programs and templates used in the book. The book is written in a clear, concise style that is easy to follow. It is a great resource for anyone who wants to learn how to use Photoshop Elements 3.

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Going from one extreme to the other is the ultra-slim category, popularized a few years ago by cameras like those in the Minolta X series, which were less than 25 mm thick. Now, expect to see five megapixel models that are 20 mm thick, or less than 15 mm in the case of Sony's CyberShot T7. The main body of the T7 is actually just 9.8 mm, but a lens cover pushes it to 14.7 mm at its thickest part. Amazingly, this Sony model also includes a 3x optical zoom lens that uses what's become known as a "folded path optical system" to allow it to work in such a thin body. A few other manufacturers have announced their own variations on this ultra-thin theme, including Fujifilm with its Z1 (18.6 mm thick) and Nikon with its CoolPix S1 (19.7 mm thick) and Pentax with its Optio S5n (21 mm thick).

Digital cameras are also incorporating more intelligent circuitry. For example, Kodak Canada recently briefed HUB on its new line of digital cameras, and its Z line now incorporates 18 pre-programmed shooting modes. Shooting modes are a somewhat under-publicized feature of most digital cameras. While an advanced photographer would know how to set up the camera for an outdoor scenic or a portrait or to compensate for snow or backlighting, beginners or casual users don't know or don't want to know the technical details of such things as aperture, shutter speed or depth of field. Shooting modes do this for you by picking the optimal settings for a variety of situations.

Taking the intelligence of shooting modes to another level is Nikon, which has announced a face-priority autofocus system that's available on some Coolpix models. It is activated when you select the Portrait shooting mode. Using a facial recognition technology developed by a company called Identix, the autofocus system identifies facial features and then uses that area of the frame for focusing.

By David Tanaka



Sony CyberShot T7



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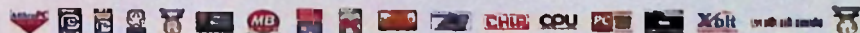
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DV, or Not DV

Ongoing look at digital video tips, tools and techniques

Forever is a long time. Changes in video recording formats and storage technology only make it more so, especially when preserving and protecting valuable media content.

As mentioned last time in DV, or Not DV, digital video offers many advantages and possibilities, but as an acquisition and storage medium, analog still has a lot of value.

Simply put, analog video (VHS, S-VHS, Hi-8) is recorded to tape as electronic waves in a continuous stream. Digital video is recorded as bits – individual ones and zeroes – laid down as packets of data to tape, DVD or

other storage device. Digital is less susceptible to interference and multi-generation quality loss, but it must be highly compressed to be used in the first place.

Love 'em or hate 'em, there are still more analog camcorders than digital out there. Lots of us still have treasured memories on VHS (and film, for that matter); some of us think vinyl sounds better than CD. Luckily, there are ways to protect analog content, and to convert it into the digital domain now dominating consumer and professional video production. It's been nearly fifty years since the first commercially available magnetic tape was used to record, store and play back video. A heavy reel

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(up to 35 pounds) of two-inch tape was required for an hour of video! Today, tape barely a quarter-inch wide housed in a lightweight plastic cassette (Mini-DV) holds the same amount.

But no matter its capacity, tape has a limited life expectancy. Physically, videotape is made of three basic materials: magnetic (metal oxide) particles, a polyurethane-based binder, and a polyester backing material. But both the physical resilience and magnetic properties of tape can deteriorate over time due to chemistry, storage conditions and other factors.

The best way to prevent this is to store in a moderate environment, not too hot or cold, not too dry or humid, and with minimal dust and pollutants in the air.

Videocassettes should be "exercised" regularly; fast forward and/or rewind them after recording or playback, and periodically — once every six months or so — during long-term storage. (Store them vertically, like a book, not flat or horizontal).

Of course, it's a good idea to avoid putting videotapes too close to any magnetic field; a few feet should be enough (don't stack 'em on top of your stereo speakers).

Today, there are literally hundreds of products available to convert analog media into digital. From less than \$100 to more than \$1,000, A/V converters come as circuit boards for use inside a computer, or as stand-alone boxes than sit on a desktop or mount in an equipment rack. With analog input connections (S-video, RCA composite video and/or audio) and a DV output (IEEE-1394 or FireWire) or two, such devices can help you protect old media material simply by copying to a more modern medium (and one that will hopefully last a while) like a hard drive or DVD. Once digitized, of course, such material can also be re-arranged, enhanced or corrected using DV image manipulation and editing tools. Canadian companies like Matrox and Miranda are among the industry leaders in converter technology, and companies from A to Z (ADS Tech to Zotz Digital) offer such tools as well.

I've been using ADS' Instant Music box recently; it's a handy way to convert old LPs and analog cassettes to audio CD and/or mp3 digital. I can burn CDs, include the music in video edits, and use other software to clean up hisses, pops and scratches easily. For video conversion, the DAC-100 from Data Video is a mid-priced desktop box for bi-directional analog/digital conversion. It's easy to set-up, and it delivers good results from a wide variety of old and new analog tape sources.

By Lee Rickwood

Lee Rickwood is a freelance writer and independent video producer. He operates Word On A Wire, an independent company providing editorial, media production and consulting services to individuals and companies across North America. He can be reached at videodaze@goodmedia.com.

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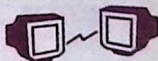
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Aurally speaking

Setting up good audio for a home theatre can be a sound investment

Those who purchased or rented *The Day After Tomorrow* on DVD may recall continually looking over their shoulder when US Army helicopters whizzed by, seemingly from behind, then from left to right and back again. The choppers then froze and fell to the ground with an aimighty thhhumppp. When a giant tidal wave blanketed Manhattan, a distinct whoooooosh swirled around your family room. And the crraaaaaaack from the separation of an enormous glacier from the mainland caused your couch to rumble uncontrollably.

What's that? You didn't get the same aural experience while watching this flick? Perhaps it's time to invest in a better sound system instead of relying on those small, flat-sounding speakers built into your television.

Sure, a big-screen TV is undoubtedly the center of attention in any family room these days, but without surround sound, you're only getting half the picture.

The good news is that it doesn't take an engineering degree to understand it all, so consider this a short primer on the what, why and where of home audio.

What you need

Granted, a DVD player can be hooked up to a television set with only right and left speakers for stereo sound (i.e. two channels) but most DVD movies feature 5.1 surround sound (pronounced "five-dot-one," "five-point-one" or just "five-one") for a richer, more immersive audio experience.

What does the "5.1" mean, you ask? Hollywood films are usually recorded in six discrete channels, where a different audio track is heard per channel: a centre speaker (where an estimated 80 per cent of the movie's dialogue comes from); front left and front right speakers, low left and rear right speakers, and a subwoofer that delivers that low frequency bass (the "1" in the 5.1 equation).

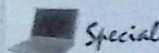
Movie theatres are set up to deliver this multi-channel sound to its patrons, so why not in the home?

To replicate this 5.1 surround for your home theatre, a "receiver" is needed to split the audio signal into these distinct channels. Five speakers



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 Monitor: LG 1710a 17" LCD 1280x1024 264mm 500:1 16ms
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 LAN: Marvell 8001 GbLAN
 Case: Aluminum Mid-Tower & 300W P/S
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 HD: 80GB Master DiamondMax SATA Drive
 Video: Giga Byte Radeon 9800SE 128MB DVI/TV out
 Monitor: LG 1710a 17" LCD 1280x1024 264mm 500:1 16ms
 Optical Drive: Memorex 16x DVD +/-RW
 Audio: Onboard C-Media High Def 8 Channel Audio
 LAN: Marvell 8001 GbLAN
 Case: Mid-Tower (3316-04) with 300W P/S
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 Mouse: Microsoft Wireless Optical USB Mouse
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 Video: Giga Byte Radeon 9800SE 128MB DVI/TV out
 Monitor: LG 1710a 17" LCD 1280x1024 264mm 500:1 16ms
 Optical Drive: Memorex 16x DVD +/-RW
 Audio: Onboard C-Media High Def 8 Channel Audio
 LAN: Marvell 8001 GbLAN
 Case: Aluminum Mid-Tower & 300W P/S
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and a subwoofer are also required (usually sold as a package), which connect to the receiver and are then placed around the TV room. A subwoofer is multidirectional so it can be placed anywhere in the room on the floor, whereas the five speakers should be at ear level, facing the listener. Sometimes the speakers will come with stands or wall-mounting brackets.

The important centre channel is usually a slightly larger speaker than the other four, and typically sits on top of the TV, facing the viewer.

The centre of all these speakers, usually near the rear of the room, is often called the "sweet spot" as it's a perfect audio balance.

The receiver, which often includes an amplifier and FM tuner, is consid-

ered the "hub" or "brain" of your home theatre because all your audio and video input cables are connected to it, such as a DVD player, PVR and satellite dish or digital cable box.

Users can often tweak the sound settings on the receiver, which include adjusting various pre-set levels per speaker or adding fancy effects such as making the audio sound like you're in a jazz club or concert hall. How loud the speakers are set is entirely up to the individual, but a receiver capable of 500 watts of total power should be enough.

The cost of a receiver varies greatly, but \$300 on the low end is typical. It's an investment, but keep in mind it can stay with you for a long while as you purchase new DVD players and speakers over

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

915P - A

CPU: LGA775 for Intel P4
Chipset: Intel 915P + ICH6
FSB: 800MHz
Memory: Dual DDR2 + DDR
MAX: 2 DDR2 + DDR / 2G
VGA: N/A
Audio: 6-CH audio
Slots: 1 AGP Express, 1 PCI Express x 16, 2 PCI Express x 1, 2 PCI
Connector: 4 SATA ports, 6 USB 2.0
Form Factor: ATX


915 - A

CPU: LGA775 for Intel P4
Chipset: Intel 915GV + ICH6
FSB: 800MHz
Memory: Dual DDR2 + DDR
MAX: 2 DDR2 + DDR / 2G
VGA: Integrated
Audio: 6-CH audio
Slots: 1 PCI Express Lite, 2 PCI Express x 1, 1 AGP Express, 2 PCI
Connector: 4 SATA ports, 6 USB 2.0
Form Factor: ATX


848P - A7

CPU: LGA775 for Intel P4
Chipset: Intel 848P + ICH5
FSB: 800MHz
Memory: DDR
MAX: 2 DDR / 2G
VGA: N/A
Audio: 6-CH audio
Slots: 1 AGP 8x / 4x, 5 PCI
Connector: 2 SATA ports, 8 USB 2.0
Form Factor: ATX



661FX - M7

CPU: LGA775 for Intel P4
Chipset: SiS 661FX + 984
FSB: 800MHz
Memory: DDR
MAX: 2 DDR / 2G
VGA: Integrated
Audio: 6-CH audio
Slots: 1 AGP 8x / 4x, 3 PCI
Connector: 2 SATA ports, 8 USB 2.0
Form Factor: Micro ATX



AMD 64 Athlon



nForce4 - Ultra

CPU: Socket 939 AMD K8 CPU
Chipset: NVIDIA nForce4 Ultra
FSB: 2000 MT/s
Memory: Dual DDR
MAX: 4 DDR / 4G
VGA: N/A
Audio: 6-CH audio
Slots: 1 PCI Express x 16, 2 PCI Express x 1, 3 PCI
Connector: 2 1394a, 10 USB 2.0, 6 SATA ports
Form Factor: ATX




nForce4 - A939

CPU: Socket 939 AMD K8 CPU
Chipset: NVIDIA nForce4
FSB: 2000MT/s
Memory: Dual DDR
MAX: 4 DDR / 4G
VGA: N/A
Audio: 6-CH audio
Slots: 1 PCI Express x 16, 2 PCI Express x 1, 3 PCI
Connector: 4 SATA ports, 10 USB 2.0
Form Factor: ATX





760GX - M

CPU: Socket 754 for AMD K8 CPU
Chipset: SiS 760GX + 964
FSB: 1600 MT/s
Memory: DDR
MAX: 2 DDR / 2G
VGA: Integrated
Audio: 6-CH audio
Slots: 1 AGP 8x / 4x, 3 PCI
Connector: 2 SATA ports, 8 USB 2.0
Form Factor: Micro ATX


755 - A2

CPU: Socket 754 for AMD K8 CPU
Chipset: SiS 755 + 964
FSB: 1600 MT/s
Memory: DDR
MAX: 2 DDR / 2G
VGA: N/A
Audio: 6-CH audio
Slots: 1 AGP 8x / 4x, 5 PCI, 1 CNR
Connector: 2 SATA ports, 8 USB 2.0
Form Factor: ATX



K8M800 - M2

CPU: Socket 754 for AMD K8 CPU
Chipset: VIA K8M800 + 823
FSB: 1600 MT/s
Memory: DDR
MAX: 2 DDR / 2G
VGA: Integrated
Audio: 6-CH audio
Slots: 1 AGP 8x / 4x, 3 PCI, 1 CNR
Connector: 2 SATA ports, 8 USB 2.0
Form Factor: Micro ATX



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the years.

Similarly, speaker prices can also vary greatly depending on power, size, design and extra features [wireless ones, for example], but look to spend about \$300 for a good set. One hundred watts per channel (speaker) is what you'll likely find.

In some cases, you can find a DVD player, receiver and complete speaker set all in one. These are usually called "Theatre in a Box" solutions. These are for those who do not want to pick and purchase each component separately. They can run as low as \$350.

Say what?

Here comes the confusing part: There are a few competing audio technologies that each deliver 5.1-channel surround sound. DVD movies are recorded and/or remastered in one or a couple of different audio technologies. The most common ones are Dolby Digital [formerly Dolby AC-3], Pro Logic II and DTS [Digital Theatre Surround].

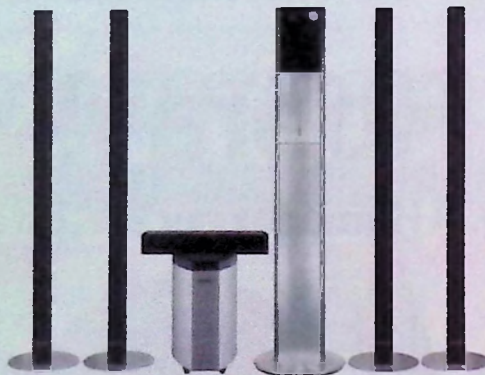
It's pointless to debate which audio technology is superior, because everyone will likely have their own opinion, but to this journalist's ears, it's DTS all the way for its stunningly full and enveloping audio.

Most receivers today support multiple audio formats – the list of supported technologies will be written on the front panel of the receiver – but keep in mind that you will need to use the digital output jacks of the DVD player [such as the digital optical jack, a small square-shaped port at the back of the player]. These cords usually need to be purchased separately, and can run about \$20 to \$30.

When purchasing a DVD movie, consumers must look on the back of the box to see what 5.1 surround sound audio technologies are supported, be it DTS, Dolby Digital, Pro Logic II or the THX multi-channel audio solution.

By Marc Saltzman

Questions and comments relating to the Home Entertainment section, including Marc Saltzman's monthly column, can be sent to homeentertainment@ppublishing.ca.



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		Radeon X600 PRO 256M (PCI-E)	\$129		
		ATI ALLWIN X600 PRO 256M	\$269		
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		LG 16X DVD +/- RW 4163B DL	\$65		
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		SONY 16X DVD +/- RW DW-26A DL	\$69		
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		512 DDR 400 DUAL Kingston	\$75		
		1024 DDR 400 DUAL Kingston	\$139		
		USB Memory 256/512M Kingston	\$39/\$59		
		APACER AUDIO BTEHO AV220 256M	\$59		
		APACER AUDIO BTEHO AV220 512M	\$79		
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		58 Audigy 2 Value 7.1 PCI SC Retail	\$79		
\$ 369		AMD sempron 2500+		\$ 309	
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RADEON 9250 128M TVO		80GB 7200RPM HDD		ASUS P4V8X-X	
52X32X52 CDRW		1.44 Floppy Drive		256MB DDR400 PC3200 RAM	
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\$309		\$379		52X CD-ROM	
				1.44 Floppy Drive	
				Sound & Lan onboard	
				front USB CASE/KB/Mouse/SPK	
				P-4.2.4A 533 1MB	
				\$379	
				P-4.2.4A 533 1MB	
				\$449	
\$ 489		\$ 649		\$ 549	
AMD Athlon 64 3000+		AMD Athlon 64 3000+ (939)		INTEL P-4.3.0G (530)	
ASUS K8V-X		Gigabyte K8NF-9 (939)		ASUS P5GD1-V	
512MB DDR400 PC3200 RAM		512MB DDR400 (Dual Kingston)		512MB DDR 400 PC3200 RAM	
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60GB 7200RPM HDD		16X DVD/RW +/- DL		160GB SATA HDD ATA150	
52X32X52 CDRW		1.44 Floppy Drive		16X DVD/RW +/- DL	
1.44 Floppy Drive		Sound & Lan onboard		1.44 Floppy Drive	
Sound & Lan onboard		front USB CASE/KB/Mouse/SPK		Sound & Lan onboard	
front USB CASE/KB/Mouse/SPK		front USB CASE/KB/Mouse/SPK		front USB CASE/KB/Mouse/SPK	
AMD Athlon 64 3000+		AMD Athlon 64 3200+939		P-4.3.2G 800 (540)	
\$519		\$709		\$599	
UPG: ASUS K8N E DX		AMD Athlon 64 3500+939		P-4.3.4G 800 (550)	
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1.44 Floppy Drive		1.44 Floppy Drive		1.44 Floppy Drive	
Sound & Lan onboard		Sound & Lan onboard		Sound & Lan onboard	
front USB CASE/KB/Mouse/SPK		front USB CASE/KB/Mouse/SPK		front USB CASE/KB/Mouse/SPK	
AMD Athlon 64 3200+		AMD Athlon 64 3200+		P-4.3.2G 800 (540)	
\$899		\$1009		\$929	
AMD Athlon 64 3500+		AMD Athlon 64 3500+		P-4.3.4G 800 (550)	
\$989		\$1099		\$999	
		UPG: ASUS A8N-SLI DX		Upgrade: P5GD2 Premium	
		\$+70		\$+50	

Budding Media Moguls: All you need is drive

There's been a lot of talk over the last year about multimedia streaming devices that allow you to take the music, photos and videos from your PC and access them on your TV or home theatre. If you want to set up media streaming but don't have a wireless home network in place yet, we have a couple of ideas for you.

ViewSonic Wireless Media Kit

If you don't have a wireless network in your home but you've been thinking of getting one specifically to stream media to various points around the house, you might want to take a look at ViewSonic's Wireless Media Kit.

The "Kit" is actually a bundle of ViewSonic's two wireless media products, both of which you'd need for a basic network. The first is the Wireless Media Gateway, which not only serves as a wireless broadband router, but has either an 80GB or 120GB "Media Drive" onboard for storing your files. This setup allows you to view your media content without any computers turned on.

The second piece is the Wireless Media Adapter, which you hook directly to your TV or home theatre. This piece doesn't have any storage onboard, just an 802.11b/g transceiver which allows you to wirelessly pull your content from the Gateway module. Because the Adapters are also sold separately, you can buy a bundle at the start, and then add additional Adapter modules for other rooms in your house. (The Gateway will handle

ViewSonic Wireless Media Kit

www.viewsonic.com

Price: \$990 - \$1115 (from US\$799 - \$899)

Pros: Gateway has 80GB or 120GB hard drive built in, PC-free media streaming to an Adapter, file sharing between all PCs on network, doubles as your Wi-Fi broadband router

Cons: Install program and manual need work, pricey, spinning drive can be noisy

multiple Adapters simultaneously, though performance will suffer if everyone is streaming video at the same time.)

Because the Gateway is also a broadband router, you can also get Wi-Fi-enabled notebooks and PCs online from anywhere in the house, and each of those computers will also have access to the files on the Media Drive. When you install the software that comes with the kit, it creates a pair of shortcuts on your Windows desktop that point to the network drive. You can also get to the Media Drive through My Network Places, and you can store any kind of data you want on the drive, not just media files. This makes it easy to transfer large files at any time between computers in the house — just dump them on the Media Drive, and then retrieve them from the other PC. (Though the installer is Windows-only, Linux

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Ritek Unbranded DVD-R 4.7Gb 8X Silver Thermal Printable, 50pcs	\$38.22
Ritek Unbranded CD-R80 White Inkjet Printable, 100pcs	\$35.28
Ritek Unbranded CD-R80 Silver Inkjet Printable, 100pcs	\$35.28
Ridata DVD-R 4.7Gb 8X White Inkjet Printables, 50pcs	\$37.49
Blank DVD Cases, Box of 100	\$22.00

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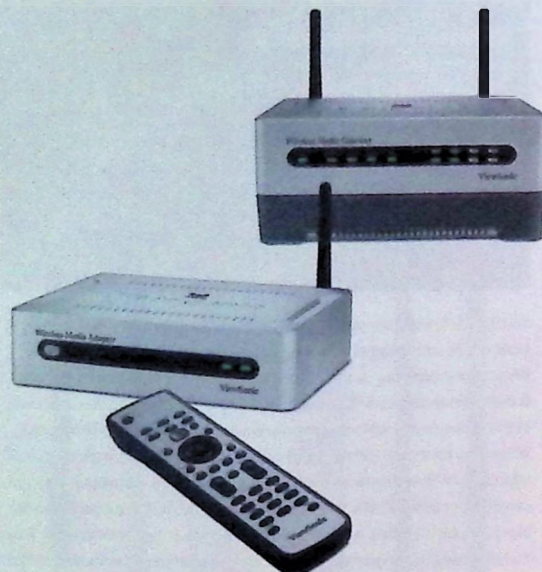
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and Mac users with networking skills should be able to set up access manually.]

While the advantages offered up by the Wireless Media Kit are many, there are a few quirks that are definitely worth noting, owing largely to this being a first generation product. The first: when you run the installer program to create shortcuts to the Media Drive, the installer just plunks them there unceremoniously without telling you what it's done. It's so abrupt, in fact, that you may think that nothing has happened; early versions of the manual don't mention the process, either. Thankfully, an updated manual is included with newly-shipped products.

Another problem we found was that images larger than five megapixels didn't appear on the Adapter's menu system even if they were on the Gateway. A ViewSonic tech spokesperson confirmed that this was a known issue and that the company was working on a fix.

It's also worth noting two things about the hard drive inside the Gateway: First, spinning hard drives generate noise, so you'll want to place the Gateway well away from locations where quiet is desired (like a reading room or a bedroom). Secondly, whether you choose the 80GB or the 120GB drive, the capacity will be limited, unlike a computer where additional internal or external storage can be added. If you're planning to load up the drive, be prepared to edit your library regularly.

The biggest downside is the pricing. At about \$1,000 for the bundle and roughly \$400 per additional Adapter, it can get pretty costly, pretty quickly. If you shop around, you can find the various components and bundles on sale, though ... be sure to compare.

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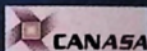


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LaCie Silverscreen

If you don't want to deal with the hassle of setting up, securing and maintaining a wireless network in your home, it's pretty much game over in terms of getting your multimedia files from your computer to the home theatre setup, right?

Not so fast. LaCie has made a name for itself by providing external storage for users who don't want to (or can't) crack open their computer case to add a hard drive or DVD burner. The Silverscreen is the newest in its series of mobile drives, featuring a USB 2.0 connection to your computer – either Windows or Mac – and a capacity of either 40GB or 80GB. The main difference here is that the drive also features audio/video output

and a remote control, allowing you to hook it directly into your TV or home theatre setup ... or to take it over to a friend's house to share your media there.

The drive hooks directly to your computer's USB port, which provides power to the drive. When you have it connected to your television, there's a power adapter that hooks straight into the USB port on the back of the drive. Unfortunately, the power from the USB port on a PC or notebook isn't always enough to keep the drive up and running, which means you'll probably want to make use of the included dongle that allows you to use the AC power adapter even when you're plugged into the PC.

Getting your media onto the drive is dead simple. After you plug in the



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Pentium 4 2.4 \$420
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BenQ 16x DVD Rom
ATI Radeon X800Pro 256MB PCIe TV-Out
Karajan Dolby 7.1 audio
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X-Allen Gaming Mid Tower
Tagan 420W 24pin ATX2.0 Dual Fan PSU
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3.4 1121 3.4 1138
64bit 2MB L2 3.2 1121

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Intel Pentium 4 3.0E HT

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Ninja Gaming Mid Tower
Tagan 420W 24pin ATX2.0 Dual Fan PSU
Logitech LX300 Cordless Desktop

3000+ \$1138
3200+ \$1192
3600+ \$1288

\$1405⁹⁵

AMD Athlon 64 3000+

MSI K8T Neo-FiS2R VIA K8T800 Motherboard
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WD 160GB 8MB 7200rpm HD
BenQ DW1620 16x DVD Writer
ATI Radeon 9250 128MB TV-Out
Realtek ALC655 5.1 audio
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Promise 20378 SATA RAID
Coolermaster Cavalier 3 Mid Tower
Coolermaster Super Silent 350W PSU
Microsoft Multimedia KB, Optical Mouse
Subwoofer Speaker

2800+ \$735
3200+ \$820
3400+ \$855

\$765⁹⁵

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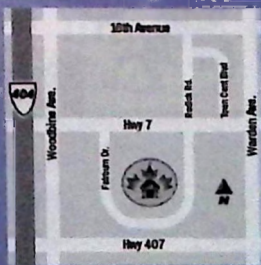
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2.4A/2.66 \$158/172	2400+/2500+ \$83/86	Acer 1913 19" 2048x1536 \$395
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By Sean Carruthers

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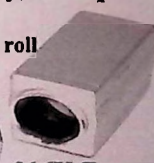
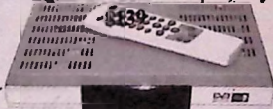
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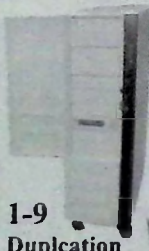


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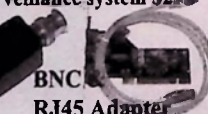
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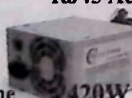
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Summer Blockbusters 101

Suggested DVD viewing to prepare for this year's mega-movie blitz

The summer of 2005 is shaping up to be a mighty busy time for popcorn-munching, matinee-loving moviegoers.

Comic book fans are looking forward to Fantastic Four, sci-fi buffs are eagerly anticipating the Spielberg-helmed remake of War of the Worlds, and devotees of the surreal are fervent to find out how Tim Burton's adaptation of Roald Dahl's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory will fare.

But before legions of nerds start lighting up their Duracell-powered lightsabers and getting in line for the final instalment of George Lucas'

new Star Wars trilogy, it might be a good time to revisit on DVD some of the movies that helped form our conception of what a blockbuster is all about.

Released in the summer of 1977 and often cited as one of the first true blockbusters, the original Star Wars [now officially referred to as Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope] wasn't available on DVD until late 2004, when it was released as part of a boxed set containing all three movies from the first Star Wars trilogy.

Presented in its original anamorphic widescreen aspect ratio of 2.35:1, Star Wars is accompanied by enough special features to keep a Padawan learner busy for days, including a glimpse at some of the earliest versions of the script and a 150-minute documentary that is perhaps the deepest and most personal filmed account of the making of Star Wars ever made. In June 1981, the creative juices of Lucas were mingled with those of Steven Spielberg as they let loose upon moviegoers Raiders of the Lost Ark, an action-packed homage to the serial adventure films Lucas had grown up with.

Released as part of The Adventures of Indiana Jones four-DVD set in 2003, which includes all of the Indiana movies to date, Raiders of the Lost Ark is a spectacle to behold on high definition 16:9 televisions thanks to a frame-by-frame digital restoration and re-mastering project undertaken by the studio.

The Indy trilogy also comes with a bonus disc that is bursting with



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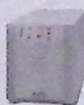
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material, including never-before-seen footage and more than three hours of documentaries, one of which showcases how the special effects team managed to pull off all of the films' stunts in the era before digital effects technology.

A year less a day after the release of *Raiders* came another phenomenally successful Spielberg picture: *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial*. This heartwarming film about an alien stranded on Earth imparted a wealth of enduring pop culture fodder, including the still heard catch phrase "E.T. phone home", a memorable silhouette of a bicycle in front of the moon, and, of course, the title character's glowing, healing, elongated finger.

The Collector's Edition DVD features beautiful blemish-free digital transfers of both the original theatrical release of *E.T.* as well as the 2002 special edition, which was reworked to add scenes and enhance special effects.

In the summer of 1986 the movie on everyone's mind was *Top Gun*, the first major Hollywood hit for modern day superstar Tom Cruise. An ideal date movie, *Top Gun* delivered planes and motorcycles for the guys and laid on love and

tragedy for the girls.

Among the extensive supplemental material included in the Special Collector's Edition DVD released last Christmas is a fascinating commentary that provides insight from a naval pilot who flew aircraft in the film as well as a retired Admiral who acted as a technical advisor.

In July 1991, Joe Moviegoer's blockbuster expectations were forever changed upon the release of *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, a movie with special effects so mind-boggling that millions of people headed out to theatres just to see what all the brouhaha was about.

The age of digital effects had ostensibly arrived with *T2*, as it was called, and the Extreme Edition DVD — which features an extended version of the film digitally mastered from a high-definition telecine transfer — explores the influence of *T2*'s special effects on subsequent filmmakers.

The cinematic digital evolution continued with the amazingly lifelike dinosaurs seen in 1993's *Jurassic Park*. Earning nearly a billion dollars worldwide, we couldn't get enough of the movie's bird-like raptors, veggie chomping apatosauruses, and terrifying T-Rexes.

The Collector's Edition DVD continues the audience's Mesozoic Era education with its dino glossary, and expands our special effects knowledge through several documentaries that explain the digital animation process.

By the mid-nineties, filmmakers with blockbuster budgets were busy dreaming up all sorts of ways to use computer graphics to blow our minds. In the months leading up to 1996's *Independence Day*, the creative team of Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin promised



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audiences a spectacular science-fiction epic with special effects delivering destruction on a scale unlike anything audiences had seen before.

On July 4, they made good their promise. Independence Day provided civilization devastation by the ton, including a spectacular sequence that involved the flattening of New York City — the first of three Big Apple assaults carried out by the Devlin/Emmerich team (the others can be seen in *Godzilla* and *The Day After Tomorrow*).

The Limited Edition Independence Day DVD includes a multi-story option that allows viewers to watch either the original theatrical version or a new extended cut that sheds light on several story elements, including the aliens' motives.

The CGI assault on New York continued with *Armageddon*, a remarkably successful collaboration between uber-producer Jerry Bruckheimer and notable action film director Michael Bay. In the film's breathtaking opening sequence, a meteor shower pounds through the city's skyscrapers like baseballs through picture windows.

So impressive was this half-billion dollar blockbuster that Criterion Collection, a company best known for producing high-end collectors' DVDs of hard-to-find cinema classics, worked with Bay to personally supervise the creation of an exclusive director's cut that contains nine minutes of previously unseen film footage presented in a new digital transfer.

Box office records are shattered nearly every summer, but the 2002 adaptation of one of the most cherished comic book heroes of all time, *Spider-Man*, has managed to hold on to several of the milestones it achieved, including that most coveted of box office trophies: highest grossing weekend (it earned about \$115 million in three days).

The two-disc Special Edition *Spider-Man* DVD is jammed with supplemental material, including an historical documentary and a look at some of the artists noted for drawing the web-slinging Wall Crawler.

Whether any of the movies in this summer's crop of mega-budgeted, special effects laden silver screen extravaganzas will meet or beat the box office records set by *Spider-Man* is anyone's guess. The one thing we can count on is that, blockbuster or dud, each will look great on DVD and come with some pretty nifty supplemental stuff.

By Chad Sapieha

Box office information sourced from www.the-numbers.com.

Star Wars (part of the Star Wars Trilogy boxed set)

Originally released: May 25, 1977

Total worldwide gross: \$798M



Raiders of the Lost Ark (part of The Adventures of Indiana Jones boxed set)

Originally released: June 12, 1981

Total worldwide gross: \$384M

E.T. the Extra Terrestrial: Collector's Edition

Originally released: June 11, 1982

Total worldwide gross: \$776M



Top Gun: Special Collector's Edition

Originally released: May 16, 1986

Total worldwide gross: \$345M



T2: Extreme DVD

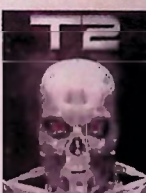
Originally released: July 3, 1991

Total worldwide gross: \$517M

Jurassic Park (Collector's Edition)

Originally released: June 11, 1993

Total Worldwide gross: \$919M



Independence Day (Limited Edition)

Originally released: July 3, 1996

Total worldwide gross: \$813M

Armageddon (Criterion Collection)

Originally released: July 1, 1998

Total worldwide gross: \$555M



Spider-Man (Special Edition)

Originally released: May 3, 2002

Total worldwide gross: \$822M



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
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
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


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
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
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The Promise and Pratfalls of City-Wide WiFi

The promise

For years, wires have been the bane of my domestic existence. As an electronic musician and techie, I have had wires of every variety snaking throughout my home, getting underfoot and causing no end of head scratching to determine which of them is at fault in a given communications failure. It should be viewed as no surprise, therefore, that I was among the first to jump on the wireless networking bandwagon. To finally be rid of unsightly cables running under carpets and across sections of bare floor seemed like the best gift I could ever have received from the gods of tech. I felt truly emancipated!

For a long time, my home remained a virtual oasis in a desert of wireless networking traffic ... then my neighbours got religion. Now, on any given day I can see no less than 10 other wireless routers in my area, all crowded into the same narrow spectrum vying for their own piece of the 802.11 pie. With this burgeoning adoption of high speed Internet connectivity and WiFi, corporations and municipalities alike began to take notice. Why not deliver Internet services directly to the home in a manner that transcends the bonds of wired infrastructure?

The first city in the world to deploy wireless Internet access in such a manner was Zamora, Spain, followed closely by Grand Haven, Michigan. In Canada, Fredericton, New Brunswick bears the distinction of being the first to move towards total coverage, a project that is to be completed by the end of this year. Best of all, Fredericton's access is provided to its constituents by the municipality for free.

You may think, "I get my Internet access through my local cable company — what do I care if it's initially wireless or not if I can enable that functionality within the confines of my home?" The implications of metropolitan-wide wireless Internet access however, though not apparent at first blush, are far reaching indeed.

Having this persistent connection at our immediate disposal empowers the populace and negatively impacts the influence of major corporations and regulators. Media conglomerates are reduced in significance, telcos and cable companies are threatened, content access laws such as Canada's Broadcasting Act are ignored ... and this is just the tip of the iceberg. For example, will I tune in to my local radio station to listen to whatever fare they decide to deliver to me



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Product Colour	Black/Black	Black/Black	Black/Black	Black/Black	Black/Black	White	Black/Black	Black/Black	Black/Black	Black/Black	Black/Black	Black/Black	Black/Black
Panel Size													
LCD Size	17.2"	17.2"	17.2"	17.1"	17.2"	17.2"	19.2"	19.2"	19.2"	19.2"	19.2"	20.1"	23.1" (24" wide)
Display Area (mm)	387.6x271	387.6x271	387.6x271	387.6x271.4	387.6x271.3	387.6x271.31	579.3 x 321.1	579.3 x 321.1	579.3 x 321.1	579.3 x 321.1	579.3 x 321.1	438 x 338	438.4 x 338.8
Pixel Pitch (mm)	0.294	0.294	0.294	0.294	0.294	0.294	0.294	0.294	0.294	0.294	0.294	0.298	0.298
Brightness (cd/m²)	300 cd/m²	250 cd/m²	250 cd/m²	400 cd/m²	300 cd/m²	200 cd/m²	250 cd/m²	250 cd/m²	250 cd/m²	400 cd/m²	250 cd/m²	250 cd/m²	250 cd/m²
Contrast (typ.)	800:1	800:1	800:1	800:1	800:1	1000:1	800:1	800:1	800:1	800:1	800:1	1000:1	800:1
Viewing angle (LRUD)(CR+10)	140/130	140/130	140/130	140/130	140/130	170/170	140/135	140/135	140/135	140/140	170/170	170/170	170/170
Response time (ms-typ.)	8 (0-2 ms)	8 (0-2 ms)	8 (0-2 ms)	8 (0-2 ms)	12 (0-2 ms)	25 (0-12 ms)	8 ms	8 ms	8 ms	12 (0-6 ms)	25 (0-6 ms)	16 (0-7 ms)	16 (0-5/7 ms)
Monitor Size													
Resolution (max.)	1280x1024 (DGA)	1280x1024 (DGA)	1280x1024 (DGA)	1280x1024 (DGA)	1280x1024 (DGA)	1280x1024 (DGA)	1280x1024 (DGA)	1280x1024 (DGA)	1280x1024 (DGA)	1280x1024 (DGA)	1280x1024 (DGA)	1280x1024 (DGA)	1280x1024 (DGA)
Hor. Frequency (kHz)	30-82	30-82	30-82	31-81	31-81	31-81	31-81	31-81	31-81	31-81	31-81	30-81	30-81
Ver. Frequency (Hz)	56-76	56-76	56-76	56-76	56-76	56-76	56-76	56-76	56-76	56-76	56-76	50-76	50-76
Video Bandwidth (MHz)	25-135	25-135	25-135	25-135	25-135	25-135	25-135	25-135	25-135	25-135	25-135	25-135	25-135
Input connector	D-sub	D-sub DVI	D-sub DVI	D-sub DVI	D-sub DVI	D-sub DVI	D-sub DVI	D-sub DVI	D-sub DVI	D-sub DVI	D-sub DVI	D-sub DVI	D-sub DVI
Power supply (W-254 AG)	Bulk	Bulk	Bulk	Bulk	Bulk	Adaptor	Bulk	Bulk	Bulk	Bulk	Bulk	Adaptor	Adaptor
Power consumption (On mode)	40W (max)	40W (max)	40W (max)	50W (max)	50W (max)	50W (max)	42 W (max)	42 W (max)	42 W (max)	42 W (max)	42 W (max)	60W (max)	120W (max)
Idle	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
CTN Dimensions (HxWxD) (mm)	496x324	496x324	496x324	496x324	496x324	496x324	496x324	496x324	496x324	496x324	496x324	496x324	496x324
Dimensions (HxWxD) (mm)	502.7x331.3	502.7x331.3	502.7x331.3	502.7x331.3	502.7x331.3	502.7x331.3	502.7x331.3	502.7x331.3	502.7x331.3	502.7x331.3	502.7x331.3	502.7x331.3	502.7x331.3
Net Weight (kg)	3.3	3.3	3.3	4.7	4.7	6	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	8.8	8.8
Gross Weight (kg)	5.7	5.7	5.7	8.2	8.2	7.5	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1	12.1	12.1
Special Features													
Senseye	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Speaker	No	No	No	1W x 2	1W x 2	2W x 2	No	No	No	2W x 2	2W x 2	Optional 4W x 2	Optional 4W x 2
Tile (download)	4-20	4-20	4-20	4-20	4-20	4-20	4-20	4-20	4-20	4-20	4-20	4-20	4-20
Included Accessories													
Signal cable	D-sub cable	D-sub and DVI cable	D-sub and DVI cable	D-sub and DVI cable	D-sub and DVI cable	D-sub and DVI cable	D-sub and DVI cable	D-sub and DVI cable	D-sub and DVI cable	D-sub and DVI cable	D-sub and DVI cable	D-sub and DVI cable	D-sub and DVI cable
Others	None	None	None	Audio cable	Audio cable	Audio cable	None	None	None	None	None	None	None
Reliability Specs													
Lamp life (hrs) min	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	40,000	50,000
Lamp life (hrs) Typical	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000
Regulations													
Regulations	TCO99	TCO99	TCO99	TCO99	TCO99	NA	TCO99 (Blue Book)	TCO99 (Blue Book)	TCO99 (Blue Book)	TCO99	TCO99	TCO99	TCO99

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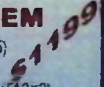


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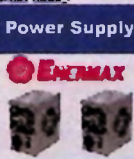
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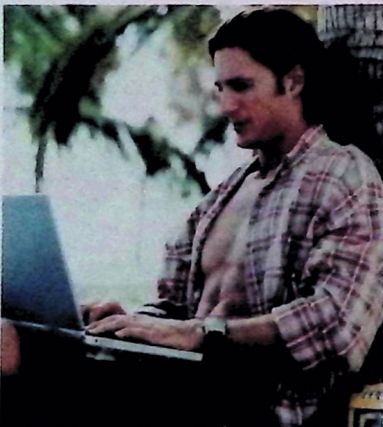
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WiMAX (802.16) is a new standard that will provide the digital glue used to bind existing WiFi hotspots together into one cohesive network. Based on microwave technology, this new medium is capable of extremely high bandwidth and theoretical ranges of up to 50 km. Read a good synopsis at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wimax> or for complete coverage go to www.wimaxforum.org.

that day, or will I instead select from among the thousands of specialized Internet-based channels that cater directly to the type of information or entertainment I am interested in? Will I simply trust what the news commentators tell me on my local television station, or will I decide for myself what to believe based on aggregated reports offering differing perspectives collected from throughout the globe? In fact, will I even bother sitting down to watch them rehash what I already know ... according to their schedule? Am I going to pay for a long distance call at home or am I going to use Voice over IP from wherever I happen to be? Will I be forced to pay for my Internet access from one of two sources (cable or DSL) or will my options be significantly more varied? I could go on and on, but I think you're beginning to get the picture.

The problems

To me, this all sounds great. However, the de facto monopolies in their respective areas will certainly not be going quietly into the night. In fact, industry-backed bills restricting municipalities from providing Internet access are being tabled all over the United States. In Texas, Bill HB 789 would impose one of the most draconian sets of regulations governing municipal involvement in communications by stating:



"A municipality or municipally-owned utility may not, directly or indirectly, on its own or with another entity, offer to the public a service as a network provider; or any telecommunications or network service, without regard to the technology platform used to provide the service." This in effect even restricts local governments from providing free Internet access within schools and libraries! On the other hand, how fair is it that municipalities can use public money to effectively eliminate existing private competition in the ISP realm? The fight concerning stewardship over Internet access has just begun and we should definitely be paying attention to our southern neighbours in order to ensure that reasonable solutions are applied here in Canada.

Finally, there are enormous security concerns in moving to a wireless-only network. Commonly available security measures such as WEP (Wired Equivalent Privacy) in wireless routers provide laughable levels of protection – and that's assuming people even enable them! In my experience locally, the vast majority of users don't bother. Truth be told, given how easy WEP is to crack, they might be considered almost justified in their reluctance to complicate their home setups. By way of example, at a recent security conference in Los Angeles, a group of FBI computer cops cracked a 128-bit WEP encrypted network in under three minutes. A less sophisticated cracker might take a little longer ... but hey, he has all day – it's not like he has to break into your house to do it! Other common encryption schemes such as WPA (WiFi Protected Access), though superior, are still quite vulnerable, leading us to question the viability of this standard over the distances involved in metropolitan area networks.

The portents

What does the near future hold for city-wide wireless Internet access? Despite initial successes in Fredericton and some other small communities in Canada, I don't see metropolitan WiFi being offered in large urban centres any time soon. There are too many major players involved and too many millions invested in existing infrastructure to allow the apple cart to be so easily upset by this technology upstart. Perhaps too, given the associated privacy and security apprehensions, moving more slowly towards this eventuality will enable us to address these concerns and provide a better and more reliable service to all.

By Ray Richards

Questions and comments relating to the Personal Computing section, including Ray Richards' monthly column, can be sent to personalcomputing@ppublishing.ca.

Trash or Treasure? Recycling PCs

The average lifespan of the personal computer is between three and five years. After that, most users have maxed out the machine in terms of upgrades and have started looking for the next big leap in technology. So where do all these old computers end up? According to the Environment Commissioner of Ontario's annual report, far too many of them are ending up in landfills.

Canadians threw away approximately 1.7 million desktop computers in 2002 according to the report, which goes on to predict that unless measures are taken, the amount of electronic waste in landfills will increase by as much as 34 per cent by 2008.

Computers and monitors can contain more than five kilograms of plastic, and various hazardous substances like lead and mercury that can leech into soil and contaminate the water supply if not disposed of properly.

Groups like the Electronic Product Stewardship (EPS) of Canada are raising awareness of the fact that recycling is a feasible and more environmentally friendly way of getting rid of an old computer.

"As an industry, we are working to elevate the awareness of the need to recycle," says Frank Fuser, director of services for Dell Canada, one of the organization's founding members. "We're

working with the government to ensure that there's a proper process in place that involves industry as well as consumers, to take the initiatives required to make sure that recycling gets done."

the minimum system requirements of P300 or better and is less than five years old. According to the organization's Web site, "Accessories like colour monitors, keyboards, mice, printers, modems, scanners, digital cameras and CD-ROM drives" are also accepted.

A similar national organization is reBOOT Canada (www.rebootcanada.ca). With eight drop-off locations in Ontario, BC, PEI and Newfoundland and Labrador, the organization accepts computers of any age or condition. There's a fee of \$10 for dropping of a monitor, and the company will also come to your door and pick up your computer for \$50.

Both the Salvation Army and Goodwill thrift stores accept donations of computers and computer peripherals, provided they are in good working condition. Goodwill requires its donated machines to have a Pentium II or higher processor.

Several computer manufacturers are also stepping up to the plate. Dell, HP and IBM have all launched donation campaigns in Canada to ensure that no computer should go to waste. Users "donate" their old computers through the companies' respective Web sites, each of which offers information on packing and pick-up options. The computers are then either recycled or donated to those who need them.

"Any consumer of product that would like to recycle their computer can donate their computer through our Web site at www.dell.ca/recycling," said Scott O'Connell, Dell's senior manager for environmental affairs. "That computer will be donated primarily in Canada. We're working with Computers for Schools, and those computers get refurbished and put back into good use."

All three companies accept computers from any

Disposal

Instead of putting your old dusty PC, monitor or printer on the curb, consider donating it to a charitable organization. You might not be satisfied with anything less than the most cutting-edge machine, but there are many schools, non-profit organizations, special needs facilities and economically disadvantaged areas that would be more than happy to receive your second-hand goods. Computers for Schools

(<http://cfs-ope.ic.gc.ca>) accepts donations to its various drop-off centres located throughout Canada, where the computers are refurbished and redistributed to needy schools. You can even get an income tax receipt for your donation if your machine meets



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
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
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
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
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
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
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
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
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
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
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
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

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manufacturer, although in each case there's a small fee involved with using these services. Dell charges \$15 per 30 pounds, while HP charges between \$20 and \$52 depending on type and quantity, and IBM charges a flat fee of \$49.99 including shipping.

The companies also offer incentives: Dell waives their fee if the donation is made by a person who has purchased a Dell computer within the last 30 days. IBM offers buyers who make a donation a discount of up to eight per cent on IBM merchandise through the "Recycle & Save" program. Dell is interested in Pentium and higher CPUs in PCs, and the system must be functional and include a hard drive, monitor, keyboard and mouse. Macintosh computers and Notebooks are also accepted. HP (www.hp.ca/recycle) will take hardware including computers, printers, scanners, monitors and fax machines, and even larger things like mainframe computers through a custom order.

Donate & Refurbish

Despite the best refurbishment efforts, there does of course come a time when a machine is too obsolete (or broken) to be of any use to anyone anymore. There are also environmentally-friendly ways to get rid of those DOS-running dinosaurs, cracked monitors, busted motherboards and other generally broken and unwanted detritus taking up valuable room in the basement.

The key in cases like these is to ensure that the machines end up at the proper recycling facilities, where they are stripped of any reuseable or hazardous parts (the latter of which are disposed of separately), then shredded and sorted into base materials like glass, metal and plastic. A person can't just leave an old computer by the side of the road and expect the recycling truck to pick it up. The machine has to be dropped off at a recycling plant during certain hours set aside for residential drop-offs. You can visit your city's recycling Web site for a list of drop-off locations and times. There's typically no charge for dropping off a machine, although this may vary from city to city.

IBM's recycling program will accept any electronics no matter how old, and the machines don't have to be in working order. Dell will take machines that are in need of repair on a limited case-by-case basis. Similarly, reBOOT will accept anything whether it's working or not, even incomplete systems and parts.

By Erin Bell



When an object becomes so old that it's "vintage", suddenly it's desirable again. Here are a few obsolete computer museums that sometimes accept donations of ancient hardware.

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Nokia 5140i

Nokia is going sporty with one of its latest additions, the 5140i.

The company is pitching the tri-band (Extended GSM 900, GSM 1800/1900MHz) phone as the ideal outdoor training partner owing to its ruggedized body and in-built Fitness Coach application designed to encourage users to "go that extra mile or finish that last set," according to Nokia. Whether the encouragement comes as gentle chiding or drill sergeant-like, all caps SMS messages is as yet unclear.

The phone, expected to ship later this quarter in Europe with wider distribution yet to be announced, can also connect with Polar Electro's line of



"wrist computers" to transfer and display graphic interpretations of data collected during a training exercise.

A rubber-looking membrane covering the keypad makes the phone dust and splash resistant and has a VGA camera and Push to Talk capability. The 5140i is expected to retail for 200 euros, about \$325.

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Turning stash into cash

eBay drop-off stores can help you exchange your old stuff for new money

It lurks in your closet, your basement, even your desk drawer. Unwanted stuff — that old printer you upgraded, that exercise bike collecting dust, a bread maker that seemed like a good idea at the time. While unwanted stuff may be a source of anxiety, guilt or chagrin, couldn't it also be a source of revenue? That's the notion behind the eBay drop-off store, a new concept whose time has come. For anyone who is busy, computer-challenged, doubtful or otherwise unmotivated to sell their unwanted goods, dropping stuff off can be a great way to finally break the cycle of basement hoarding and free up some extra cash in the process.

While most people have bought or at least know someone who has bought something on eBay, selling is a different story. For many, the process can be time-consuming and intimidating, which of course makes it a great entrepreneurial opportunity. Besides offering customers an appraisal on their item, drop-off stores also take care of writing the ad copy, professionally photographing the item, posting it on eBay, then shipping and arranging payment when the item is sold.

Peter Wohl, president and CEO of "Imagine This Sold" is enthusiastic about the entire process, calling his business "a consignment store with a difference." His first store opened in December in Toronto, and his franchise is set to expand quickly, with locations opening in Calgary, Dartmouth, N.S., and Barrie, Ont. over the next few months. With a blue and yellow colour scheme and youthful staff, the store itself is bright and bustling, "not someone in a basement" as Wohl points out. As with other drop off stores, an air of objectivity is also provided in the appraisal process by proprietary software that recommends a selling price based on an established potential bid range. The store doesn't get paid until the item is sold. On eBay, where seller reputation is everything, Wohl assures that his



company "has credibility in the eBay world."

In Waterloo, Ont., another eBay entrepreneur named Barry Triller opened his drop-off store, called WeSellIt, last June and is now listed among the top one per cent of sellers on eBay - a "Platinum Power Seller" in eBay lingo. Triller, a long-time coin collector and eBay user, had just taken early retirement and became inspired to open his business after he saw a similar operation while vacationing in the US. While he also has many clients that walk in to sell items off the street, Triller says that a large amount of his business comes from selling liquidated stock. His store is also the eBay distribution arm for several manufacturers. In addition to running his business seven days a week with the help of three full-time and nine part-time staff, Triller also trains others to operate eBay businesses (he is Canada's first certified education specialist for eBay) and is working on a book about eBay sales experiences, tentatively called *Around the World in 80 Items*.

So who uses these stores? The clientele of eBay drop off stores can be quite varied, from the antiquing enthusiast to the spring-cleaning survivor. While you might think that eBay drop off stores would serve primarily the technologically-challenged, Wohl points out they can also be a great resource for the time-challenged. It is easy to see how it would appeal to a busy urban professional to simply drop an item off and not have to pick up anything else but a cheque at the end of the deal - no sales hassle, no answering buyer questions at all hours of the day, no packaging and shipping nightmares. The commission taken by the stores averages 40 per cent (this includes the five to ten percent that eBay charges) so the customer gets 60 per cent of the final sale price for items under \$200 [the customer's profit percentage rises in relation to the sale price, see the individual store web sites for exact details]. Both stores also serve their communities by offering their services to charity for local fundraising efforts.

Another assumption one might have is that these operations would sell more items locally, however both businesses are constantly shipping around the globe. As Triller puts it, "Basically eBay's philosophy is to sell almost anything to almost anybody everywhere in the world, and we pretty well do the same."

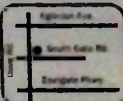
By Sue Bowness

How to use a drop-off

1. Visit the web site of an eBay drop-off store to read about their individual policies and processes. The ones mentioned in this article are Imagine This Sold (www.imagethissold.com) WeSellIt (www.wesellit.ca)
2. Choose store, drop items off. Get receipt. Most stores don't sell items valued at under \$50, so keep that in mind.
3. Store will appraise, photograph, list, package and ship the items. You'll be able to see your item for sale via a link to their store.
4. Pick up your cheque for the item after it has sold.
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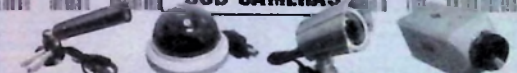
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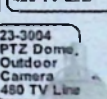
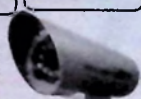


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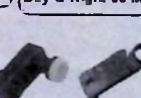


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Ergo tips for a healthier office



Quickly calculate how much time you spend in front of a computer per day. Be honest. According to a study conducted by the Microsoft Hardware group in the US, one in three office computer users said they spent between four and six hours a day using the computer, while nearly half of those surveyed said they were spending eight or more hours a day at the computer.

And that's just at work – then we come home to check personal email, chat via IM, surf the Web, play PC games, look at digital photos, download music and forward funny video clips to friends.

Sound familiar? Naturally, there are health concerns with being so attached to our computers – from carpal tunnel syndrome and other repetitive stress disorders to eye-strain, neck and back problems due to poor posture and a general lack of physical exercise.

Considering our addiction to those delicious little ones and zeros, the following is a handful of pointers on creating a healthier work (or play) environment.

- Invest in a decent chair for your desk, one with adequate lower back support. You don't need to spend hundreds of dollars on one. Costco, for example, has an all-leather armchair with cushioned lumbar vertebrae support for about \$150. A chair with wheels is also a good idea so you can easily position yourself for more comfort. Your mouse and keyboard should be at about elbow level, so adjust your chair accordingly. Both your feet should be flat on the floor – if not, use a small stepstool.

- If you need to place your monitor to the left or right side of the desk, position yourself in your chair so that you're not turning your head to see the screen. Over time, this could put unnecessary strain on your neck. Your head should be centered with your body, and you should be looking straight ahead at eye-level to see your monitor. Make sure you have adequate lighting so you're not straining to see the monitor, keyboard or papers on your desk. If you find yourself squinting to see the text on the screen, enlarge the font. In Internet Explorer, for instance, click View at the top of the screen, and then choose Text Size.

- If you frequently talk on the phone, purchase a headset so you're not trying to hold the phone between your neck and ear (and type at the same time)!



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- When shopping for a mouse, try it out at the store first to make sure it's a comfortable size and shape. Some may be specially designed for either right- or left-handed users, too. Mice should have a curved hump on top to comfortably fit the underside of your palm. When using a mouse, try to limit your wrist movement. Instead, focus on keeping your wrist straight and your elbow pivoted, and only move your forearm.
- If you suffer from wrist discomfort when using a mouse, consider a trackball instead. These interface peripherals don't require movement on

the desk at all – rather, you rest your hand on top and use your fingertips to move the ball on top.

- Keyboards come in all shapes and sizes but there are more ergonomically-designed ones that could help prevent or reduce repetitive stress injuries. One example is Microsoft's "Natural" keyboards, which have a split and slightly angled keyboard that tilts inwards to better fit our natural wrist resting position. They take some getting used to, but frequent users swear by them. Also, try to keep your wrists almost floating above

the keyboard so your hands can easily move to reach far keys (the "F" keys, for example) rather than trying to stretch your fingers to reach them. Some PC users prefer a padded or gelled wrist rest that sits right in front of the keyboard.

- Take frequent breaks. Stretch. Do some neck, back and arm exercises. Close your eyes. Stand up and get a drink of water. We all know you can lose yourself in work or a heated PC game, but you'll do your body and mind good by taking a breather!

By Marc Saltzman



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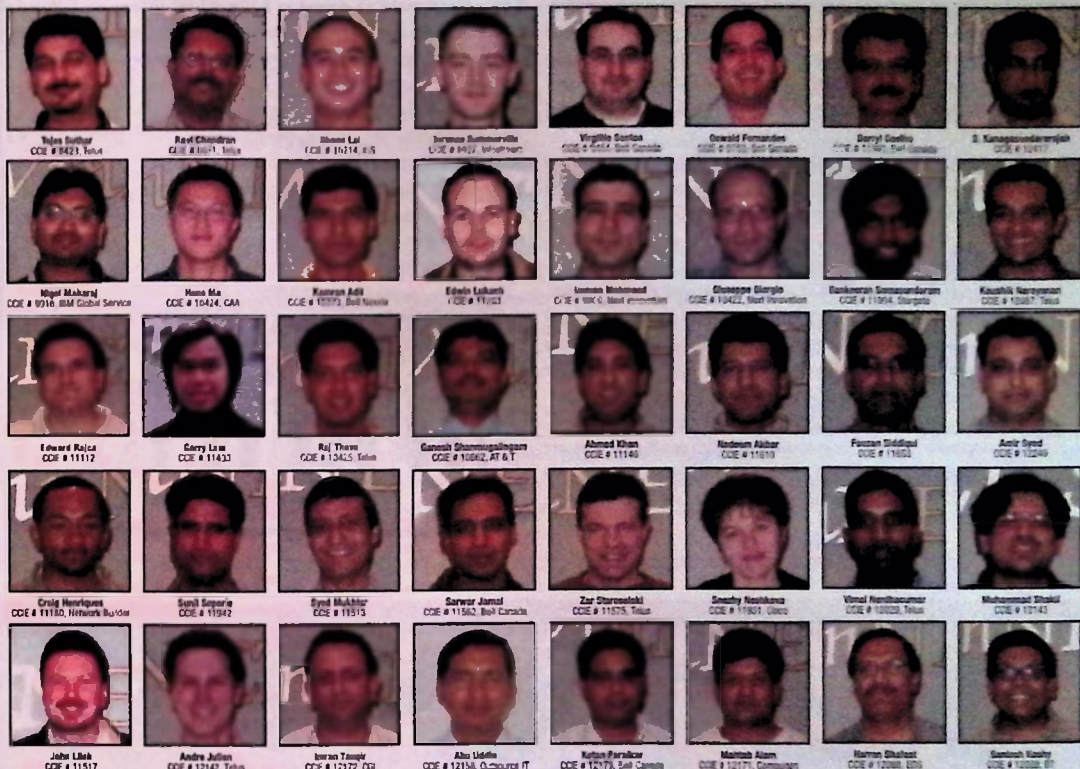
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PC Making Music: MIDI 101

Audiophiles have a mixed reaction to MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface). The very thing that made MIDI so versatile – the consistency of the same set of instruments across all sound cards and keyboards – also hindered it, because the quality of the sound output was dependent on the quality of the sound card producing the sounds. We've all winced at the quacking-duck clarinets and wet cardboard bass drum of General MIDI instruments coming through less expensive (and less powerful) equipment.

Even so, more than 20 years after its invention, MIDI remains a staple of the home music studio [in combination with audio files] and one of the more consistent and convenient method of creating digital music.

Why MIDI?

General MIDI, for all its limitations, is a constant across all sound cards, software and hardware. Aside from the aforementioned quality fluctuations from machine to machine, the instruments within General MIDI are consistent. What you composed using track 41 – a violin – will sound like a violin (or some vallant approximation thereof) on any other computer. True sound constancy could be achieved by sampling (building an actual violin sample into the file, for example), but high quality samples are not only expensive (professional orchestra collections routinely cost more than \$5,000) but can take up a lot of room on the hard drive with

sizes averaging sometimes several dozen megabytes each. As an example, the complete 162 sample East West Symphonic Orchestra Silver Edition library takes up more than 2.5GB of hard drive space. Building a complicated polyphonic track of many samples can quickly jack up the file size into even more unwieldy proportions for the casual music-maker. MIDI files, on the other hand (which typically use the .mid file extension), are merely a few kilobytes in size. The reason is that they contain no actual audio data; instead, they communicate a set of commands to the sound bank, instructing it on how to play the files. Using a MIDI controller (something to input the set of MIDI commands), you can compose music which the sequencer interprets as ones and zeroes [ON and OFF data, which translates to which keys you pressed down and for how long – ON for down, and OFF for up], in addition to velocity [how hard you pressed],



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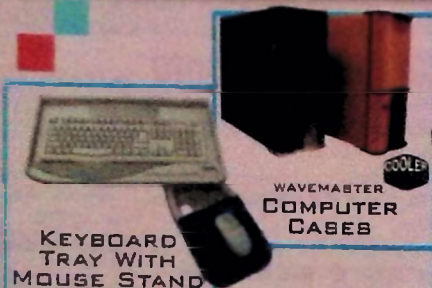
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volume controls, and other mixing board effects. The file then pulls the actual audio data from the sound bank on the host hardware.

To start the most basic of MIDI studios, all you need is a computer with a sound card, a MIDI controller and a sequencer.

MIDI Controllers

As previously mentioned, MIDI controllers are the means of inputting data into the sequencer. They most commonly take the form of MIDI-capable keyboards or digital pianos. MIDI guitars, basses, percussion pads and even wind instruments also exist, but that's fodder for a whole other column.

Most controllers can send and receive on 16 channels (one channel corresponding to one instrument in the sequencer). In other words, 16 different voices can be playing simultaneously. If more than 16 simultaneous channels are desired, a "MIDI interface" must be used. Keyboards can be as fancy or as basic as your wallet desires, as long as the basic "ON/OFF" capabilities are met. All controllers will have IN and OUT interfaces to communicate with the computer (one for sending data to the computer, and the other for processing playback data from the computer).

Connecting

There are typically three ways of connecting a MIDI controller to the computer. The first is the old-fashioned way, through the parallel port (printer port). Most keyboards still come with a compatible set of cables which have the parallel connection on one end and MIDI IN OUT connectors (to be

plugged in to the corresponding ports on the keyboard) on the other.

If the computer doesn't have a parallel port, you can use a MIDI interface such as M-Audio's Midisport, which costs around \$65 (from US\$49.95). In this case, the IN and OUT cables from the keyboard plug into the box, which then connects to the computer via a USB or FireWire port.

Finally, some more advanced sound cards with front-mounted input bays have built-in MIDI IN and MIDI OUT ports, meaning you can plug directly in to the sound card using two MIDI cables. In this case you would connect the IN from your controller goes to the OUT of your computer, and the OUT from the controller to the IN of the computer.

Some instruments also have a THRU, which allows multiple controllers to be daisy-chained together to have more voices than any single keyboard could produce.

Basically, the THRU jack passes the signal sent from the sequencer through the first controller for a second controller to receive. With two keyboards, for example, you plug the THRU jack coming out of the first keyboard into the IN jack of the second. By default, if you selected to play sound through channel 1 on your sequences, both keyboards would play and you would get two sounds happening simultaneously from the respective soundbanks of both keyboards. If, however, you turned off channel 1 on the first keyboard, then the first keyboard will simply be mute and the sound will only come from keyboard 2. This is a means of exploiting the different sound banks of each piece of MIDI equipment.

By Erin Bell

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Chewing The Core

We carry so many gadgets these days that our bags can sure get cluttered up in a hurry. Powerbook or iBook and charger, external monitor and display adapters, USB light, external mouse, laptop cable lock, cell phone and charger, iPod with headphones, charger and cables – the list goes on. There are, however, a few simple solutions that might allow you to leave one or two peripherals at home while you're out on the road.

If you're doing presentations on the road, you can leave behind your presentation remote. With a Bluetooth-enabled cell phone and Bluetooth on your iBook or Powerbook you can use Salling Clicker (www.salling.com), software that lets you control your Mac remotely over Bluetooth. You can use iTunes, PowerPoint and Keynote presentations and even write Applescripts to customize what you want to control.

If you often travel with an external USB 2.0 or Firewire hard drive, keep in mind that the iPod doubles as a hard drive that can be used to store more than just music. You can back up your PowerPoint or Keynote presentations or create backups of your favourite DVDs to eliminate having to carry them with you. The hard drives inside the iPods are by no

means beefy enough to handle demanding applications such as audio or video editing, but they are plenty fast enough to run basic PowerPoint/Keynote presentation.

If you're on the road for an extended amount of time and you know you won't have Internet access, there is a cool OSX-based application called Deep Vacuum (www.hexcat.com), which allows you to download entire Web sites to your hard drive. This can prove essential if you constantly need to refer to certain Web sites for reference or demo purposes.

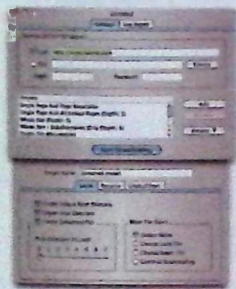
Zipling (www.zipling.com) has a Road Warrior travel kit that contains useful portable oriented products including a mini USB mouse, retractable USB extension cable, retractable network and dial-up modem telephone cable, and flexible USB Light.

Apple news

Apple released the much-anticipated OS 10.4 Tiger on April 29. Even before its release, Tiger became Amazon.com's biggest selling software title based on pre-orders alone.

Also, Micromat is now shipping its PodLock software for iPods. PodLock (www.micromat.com) is a new utility that lets you optimize the data on your iPod so it works faster, and create a secret drive within your iPod that allows you to keep sensitive data away from prying eyes. PodLock is available for around \$50 (from \$US39.97).

By Jason Justin



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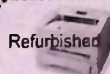
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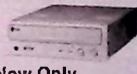


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Satellite A80	P4 1.6GHz	17" Wide	1024MB	80GB/LAN	80GB-DVD-RW	\$1199
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Terms A307P	CPU 1.6GHz	17" TFT	1120MB	80GB/LAN	80GB-DVD-RW	\$1119
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Upgrading Brand Name PCs: Part Two

Last month we discussed the pros and cons of upgrading brand name PCs. Now we're going to look at specific upgrade options, what they cost and whether they are justified in comparison to buying a new computer. For this task, I am using my Dell Dimension 2100 desktop PC, which is equipped with a Celeron 1.1 GHz Intel chip. Its Intel CAB01E motherboard has four PCI expansion slots, two DIMM memory slots, one 5.25-inch bay and two 3.5-inch bays.

Upgrade your memory

Memory upgrades are often the easiest way to kick some life into a sluggish PC. Click START at the lower left corner of the screen, then Control Panel, then Performance and Maintenance, then System. On the General tab, click Computer. The amount of RAM on your system will be displayed. You also need to determine how much memory your computer can handle. Do this by looking up the name and model of your PC on the Web. A Google search for "Dell Dimension 2100 memory maximum" reveals that I can add up to 512MB of SDRAM memory. Since my system only has two slots, I need to pull the old 128 MB sticks out and add two PC133 256MB DIMMs. I priced these at \$29 a piece [single-sided] at www.shoprbc.com. The total cost: \$58.

Add a new hard drive

The next way to pump up your PC is to add a hard drive. By adding extra storage space and then defragmenting your drives to minimize the time your

system has to search for data, you will improve system performance. In plain English, your PC should pick up the pace!

Adding a hard drive is relatively simple provided your PC case has a 3.5-inch bay open to house the disk — if you only have a spare 5.25-inch bay, Startech.com sells a 5.25-inch-to-3.5-inch drive mounting bracket kit for \$7.99.

If your case doesn't have an extra bay, you can make space by removing something, such as a rarely used 3.5-inch floppy drive. It may also be possible to secure the hard disk inside some unused space within the case. I recommend getting professional advice before trying this yourself.

Checking the Web, www.ncix.com was selling a Seagate Barracuda 120GB 7200 rpm hard drive for \$102.34 at press time. Add in the memory, and the price of these two upgrades comes to \$160.34.

Add a USB 2.0 and 7-in-1 card reader, and maybe a new CD-RW/DVD-RW

Many older PCs have USB 1.0 ports, which move data no faster than 12 Mbps. In contrast, new USB 2.0 circuits zip data along at 480Mbps. As for flash card readers? Forget it. Most older PCs were built before flash card readers had become a necessity.

To remedy these inadequacies, I recommended installing a 7-in-1 USB 2.0 flash card reader in one of your spare front bays. For instance, a 5.25-inch bay Startech 7-in-1 flash card reader/writer with two USB 2.0 ports, one FireWire port, and four audio ports was \$56.01 at www.ncix.com.



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My Dell Dimension 2100 only has a 3.5-inch bay to spare. To fill the bay, www.compusmart.com was selling an ejectable 7-in-1 flash card reader/writer with two USB 2.0 ports for \$69.99. Using the Dimension 2100 as my base, the total cost of upgrades so far stands at \$232.34.

Speaking of DVD-RWs, replacing your CD-ROM with a CD-RW or a "combo drive" can really extra performance to your system. Unless you are planning to play or record DVDs on your old PC, a CD-RW is good enough. An LG 52x32x52 CD-RW was selling for \$28.99 at www.sprintcomputer.com at press time; software and cables included. The same site was selling an LG GSA-4163B 16x DVD+R & 16x DVD-R/DVD-RAM combo drive for \$80.99.

Add a faster network card

Is your old PC equipped with a 10BaseT network card? If so, it could be slowing down your network, because a 10BaseT card only moves data at 10 Mbps. It is easy to pop out that card and replace it with a 100BaseT model that operates at 100 Mbps. Such cards are relatively cheap. For example, a 10/100-Mbps PCI Ethernet network card – which will work in my Dimension 2100 – is only \$12.99. (Since this computer already has such a card as standard equipment, I don't need to add it.)

Add a CPU upgrade

It is sometimes possible to boost your PC's performance by adding a CPU upgrade module. You just open your case, unplug and unclip your CPU, then install the CPU upgrade, plug it in, and go!

As mentioned in Part One, I quadrupled the processing speed of my old

Dell 350 MHz Pentium II by installing a PowerLeap SlotWonder 1400 (1.4 GHz) Celeron CPU Upgrade. The price: Since the 1.4 GHz SlotWonder is not listed at www.powerleap.com, the closest equivalent is the 1.3 GHz Celeron CPU Upgrade for US\$99.95 (about \$124.95).

Upgrades vs. new: which is better?

In my case, the upgrades for my Dell Dimension 2100 will cost me \$232.34. That's the bill for my 512MB memory boost, an extra 120GB hard drive, and the 7-in-1 flash card reader with USB ports.

In contrast, www.sprintcomputer.com is selling an AMD Sempron 2600 PC (running at 1.833 GHz) in a full-sized case with front-mounted USB, audio, and FireWire ports for \$399.94 – add \$50 if you have them assemble it for you. Included in this package is an ASRock K7S41GX motherboard with video, audio, and network card included, an LG-CD-RW, one Western Digital 160GB hard drive, a Panasonic floppy disk drive, and a Mitsumi 7-in-1 card reader/writer with a second floppy disk built in.

Clearly, going all-out to upgrade an existing PC may not make economic sense. However, doing some upgrades can make a big difference to your system's performance for a relatively low cost. The secret is to decide whether your system just needs a few tweaks, or requires an overhaul. If it's just a tweak or two, go for the upgrades. If it's an overhaul, then I'd recommend a new PC. At less than \$500, you can't lose!

By James Careless

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Making demands on mobility

In other words, says Femme Mobile, cut the wires and integrate



Many people take some of their office with them wherever they go. But what if your office has no fixed location and you work completely out of your computer bag?

That makes you a road warrior—a harsh 90s term that brings to mind indestructible Panasonic notebooks and army fatigues. The label doesn't really fit most of us, and certainly not me, what with technological spillover ending up in my Prada bag, and white iPod cables tangling with my diamond earrings...

Clearly, no warrior am I. So henceforth, for want of a better word, I shall refer to the modern-day road warrior as Femme/Homme Mobile (pronounced mobil-ay). In other words, people who must have technology, much like food or a good magazine, wherever they go.

Oh, the things we can do!

This is, of course, relatively easy these days. Gadgets are small and compact [sizewise, the



Canon PowerShot SD20 is on par with my cell phone]. We can fit pretty much everything from a laptop to even a portable printer into a standard shoulder bag.

In fact, when I listed all the goods I leave the house with every morning, I was surprised to count 10. Several are review units (like the Canon printer and Apple iPod), on loan temporarily. But they so beau-

tifully integrate with my work and life that I'm seriously considering adding them to my arsenal (let's just leave the Prada purchases for later).

A few gadgets aren't with me all the time, like the camera and tape recorder. But if they were, I could permanently remove fairy tale vernacular from my vocabulary. As in, put an end to audio and visual moments "I wish" I had captured.

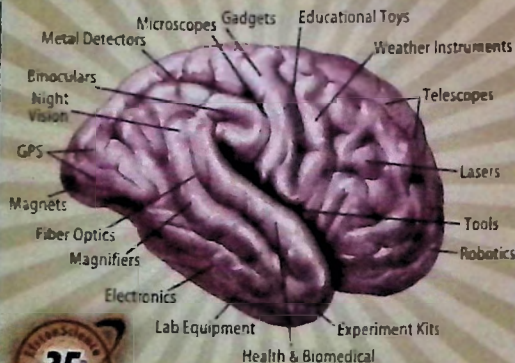
Tech to go

But while the technology brings oohs and aahs, with the exception of my old analog tape recorder—a shocker to a Bay Bloor Radio manager during a recent interview (I am planning to upgrade! Truly!)—it's more what the technology can do that amazes. Like the fact that I can connect to the Internet from pretty well anywhere, including a underground downtown mall and a remote cottage in northern Ontario, or converse and conference with Skype to the far reaches of the globe, or print a document from anywhere I happen to be back on the printer in my basement—via the Internet.

Which brings me to the other side of the shoulder bag-office experience: the dream.



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Think about the last time your cell phone was short on juice and you had no power cord. Now think, you are about to hook up a portable printer (What's the point of having it all if you can't print on demand?) – when you realize you have no USB cable. You're in the middle of the city between meetings wanting to check email using your cell phone as a modem, when you're

caught with no cable. Or, in an all too familiar example, you're just about to demo 7,000 images on your iPod Photo when you realize that the battery is dead.

Which brings me to the wants, nay, let's call them what they are, the demands, of modern-day Mobilés:

Demand one: We need to get rid of all those wires, cables and cords. They take up space (thank you wireless mouse for deleting at least one).

Demand two: We need wireless connectivity, aka Bluetooth. That would solve part of the problem of cables and cords, but what will we do with the power issue? (Thank you, iPod, for the ability to charge directly from my laptop. Wouldn't it be nice if various devices could share a charger, and charge from a laptop?)

Demand three: We need devices to amalgamate so that there are less of them. Ten items in my bag, what will that be 10 years in the future? Let's just say, I can't wait.

By Mara Gulens



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PocketSurfer

Most PDAs and cell phones come equipped with a Web browser, but since neither device was designed primarily with Internet surfing in mind, the experience is less than ideal – pages that are slow to download and reformatted to fit on tiny screens with images, tables and Java scripts removed.

Montreal-based company Datawind is bucking the convergence trend by releasing a handheld device called the PocketSurfer, which is designed to do

PocketSurfer

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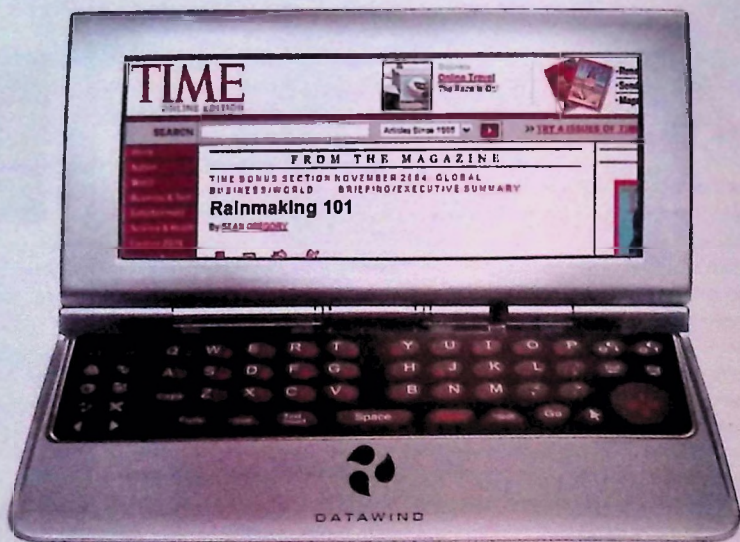
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- Wide, bright colour screen

Cons:

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- Needs to be used with a GPRS network Bluetooth phone



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only one thing: deliver the Internet quickly and legibly by recreating pages as close as possible to how they would appear on the home PC. For a device that offers nothing but the Internet, it's rather startling that the PocketSurfer isn't even capable of connecting to the Internet on its own. Instead, it piggybacks the GPRS network of any Bluetooth-enabled cell phone (with data plan activated), which in our case was a Nokia N-Gage QD. If your cell phone doesn't have Bluetooth, a Bluetooth adaptor can be purchased from Datawind.com for \$36.99. The visuals offered up by the Pocket Surfer are quite impressive. It's capable of displaying complete HTML pages with images, frames and JAVA applets intact, and sports an enormous (by handheld standards) 640x240 backlit VGA colour screen. The ample width of the screen means that Web pages don't have to be truncated, and there are no out of place sidebars, missing images, or visual elements clumsily stacked on to of each other.

Measuring the speed with which PocketSurfer downloaded Web pages was a trickier issue, however. It took about 35 seconds to load the entire HUBCanada.com main page (which is crammed full of images), but the thing to bear in mind is that the Pocket Server loads Web pages as packets of data. It starts by filling in text and extremely low-resolution versions of images on the page, then goes back and gradually fills in the images with more detail until finished.

If you're only interested in reading text, this isn't a problem because the text is legible immediately. However, Web sites where images play an integral role prove more problematic for the device. For example, when we tried to view the latest Penny Arcade Web comic (www.penny-arcade.com), it took the PocketSurfer almost five

minutes to render the image in a high enough resolution that the captions were legible.

The form factor of the PocketSurfer is compact and lightweight – as thin as a cheque book and weighing around 3.5 ounces. However, with its wafer-thin keypad on the bottom and heavy screen above, the device is top-heavy and has a tendency to fall shut if it's being held as opposed to rested on a flat surface.

Datawind charges a monthly ISP fee of \$12.99, which users must pay in addition to the data charges from the cell phone's service provider.

The PocketSurfer seems suited to a niche market of professionals who rely on receiving current weather or traffic reports, or who constantly

consult online databases (truck drivers and lawyers, for example). On the other hand, it's debatable whether PocketSurfer is the best choice for the casual road warrior. Not only is the GPRS tether cumbersome and the additional ISP charges expensive, but many users still want to enjoy such things as instant messaging and accessing an Outlook-style inbox and would be willing to put up with a slightly less than ideal Web surfing experience to do so.

By Erin Bell

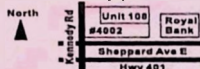
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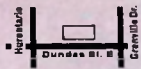
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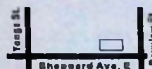
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Danger Hiptop2

www.fido.ca

Price: \$550 (\$200 with two-year Fido contract). Data plan, phone plan, text-messaging and system access fee extra.

Pros:

- Great keypad
- Numerous features
- Easy navigation both between and within apps

Cons:

- Rudimentary camera
- No support for MP3, Excel, MOV, SWF
- PowerPoint, RM, or AVI file types
- AIM only for instant messaging
- No expansion card slots
- No WiFi

The second generation of Danger's Hiptop (known in the US as the Sidekick), offers standard smart phone features like Web browsing, email, text and instant messaging, phone, and camera along with a decidedly non-standard gimmick of a screen that swivels up to reveal a thumbpad housed neatly underneath.

The Hiptop2's button layout has been tweaked so that the 204x160 colour screen is now flanked by a

ing AIM buddy list and enjoy most of the functions of the full-fledged version. The device supports up to 10 simultaneous chats, although you obviously can't have multiple chat "windows" open at the same time. Instead, you can toggle between conversations by selecting the relevant buddy from a drop-down list accessed with the Menu button.

Users can configure the email application to access up to three POP mail accounts. Common file attachments supported include JPG, GIF, PDF, WAV, AIFF and DOC files. A handful of others are read-only, including Excel and Powerpoint files, and MP3s.

The address book, calendar and To-do functions follow Microsoft Outlook in layout. It's possible to synchronize calendar, contacts and tasks from a desktop version of MS Outlook onto the Hiptop2 using a proprietary software called Intellisync. When installed, the application scans Outlook and updates the Hiptop Web server, which in turn sends the information to the device. This only works on PC, and only with MS Outlook.

The Hiptop2's weakest application is its camera, which simply doesn't take very good pictures. The largest resolution the device is capable of is 640x480 (in addition to medium: 320x240, and small: 160x120), and the tiny flash isn't powerful enough to be effective in all but close-ups. The Hiptop2 runs on a lithium polymer battery that, according to Fido, offers 4.5 hours of talk time and 60 hours on standby.

True to its name, the hipness factor of this device is extremely high. The competence with which the core functions of email, web browsing, cell phone and contacts are integrated with each other, on top of the device's ease of navigation, make it a desirable smart phone for the young, image-conscious crowd in particular, despite its rather glaring omissions in the lack of MP3 support, no expansion card slots and no instant messaging support beyond AIM.

By Erin Bell

button in each corner, an eight-point directional pad on the left and scroll wheel on the right, and two shoulder buttons.

It's a logical layout, and this combined with extensive programmable key shortcuts makes it easy to navigate through the various functions, all accessed through a main menu. The Jump button takes the user back to the main menu from within an application, while the Menu button opens up application-specific commands, such as the "Add Buddy" and "End Conversation" functions in AOL Instant Messenger.

The QWERTY thumbpad is equally impressive, built with sturdy keys spaced decently apart that stand up to rapid data entry. Aside from an "E" key, however, there are no other dedicated punctuation buttons, meaning that inserting punctuation or common symbols into the text requires holding down the Alt button. There is auto-capitalization, but no predictive text.

The phone application will automatically launch whenever you begin dialing numbers on the keypad (or letters, to dial by contact name). You can also dial when the screen is swiveled shut, using the far more time-consuming method of selecting digits one at a time using the scroll wheel.

During calls, the D-pad doubles as a speaker and you speak into a tiny microphone located above the "hang-up" button, so that the screen is pressed up against your face. You can also talk with the screen flipped up, though it's rather cumbersome to do so.

The Hiptop2 uses a GSM network for voice and a GPRS network for data. The Web browser loaded the sparse Google.com site in around seven seconds, and the busy, image heavy Hubcanada.com in around 30 seconds.

The device uses AOL Instant Messenger for instant messaging, though other popular chat programs like ICQ, Yahoo Messenger and MSN Instant Messenger are disappointingly absent. You can import an exist-





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
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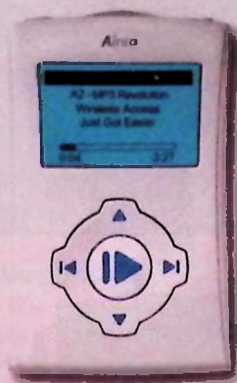
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Hit the Road: The Soundtrack Album



It might seem odd to some that Apple's most recent digital audio move was the iPod Shuffle, which basically strips player functionality back to the earliest days of the category. Oh sure, the Shuffle has 512MB or a full gigabyte of storage – far more than the 32MB or 64MB you used to see on earlier players – but by removing the LCD screen outright, Apple is essentially selling a player with roughly the same capabilities that you'd have found on a player from 1998.

Is it a triumph of marketing over substance? The cynics might say

so, but to quote my favourite Klingon warrior: "It's the software, stupid!" Back when the Rio 300 was first introduced, getting your music onto the player was pretty much a manual process: choose the songs one-by-one, and then transfer them to the player ... slowly.

The Shuffle, on the other hand, relies heavily on the years of smarts built into the iTunes software, to the point that you don't even have to be involved in the process: just plug it in, and iTunes will pick your next batch of music for you based on your pre-determined criteria. Simple. No matter how nice the hardware, competing manufacturers still have trouble duplicating the ease of use of the software, which is why Apple's still the one to beat.

Snap snap

One area where other digital audio player manufacturers have already taken their lead from Apple is in hard drive players with photo display capabilities. The iPod Photo's colour screen not only pepped up the menu system, but made it possible to show off small reproductions of your favourite photos. The only problem – as with previous iPod products – was the price.

Enter the competition. Taking their cue from the physical size and disk capacity of the iPod Mini, manufacturers such as Samsung, iRiver and Creative have hit back with price-conscious models that can also display photographs.

Samsung's Yepp YH-820 (www.samsung.ca) comes with a 5GB hard drive, and features a 1.5-inch [128x96 pixel] colour screen for displaying your

JPG images. The player handles both MP3 and WMA audio files, has a built in voice recorder, and can sync to your computer using Windows Media Player 10. The downside: It's only compatible with Windows XP. It sells for about \$300.

The iRiver H10 (www.iriver.com) seems remarkably similar if you glance at the spec sheet, but look closer and you'll notice that it also has a built-in FM tuner,



and gives you the ability to remove and replace the battery yourself – something you don't get on either the iPod or the Yepp model. You're going to pay a bit more for these bonuses, though: the player costs about \$380.

Creative is also working on a photo version of its Zen Micro player, to be released mid-way through the year. The player looks to

be virtually identical to its current Zen Micro model, but will feature a colour OLED screen. Many manufacturers are continuing to work through pesky quality issues with OLED screens, which could account for the later launch of the Creative model. When it finally does hit the market, expect it to have a competitive price.

Going on the air

If it seems like there hasn't been a huge change in the world of digital audio players for a while, get ready for SoniqCast's Aireo 2 (www.soniqcast.com).

The Aireo is billed as a "wireless" audio player, and it's true in more than one way. First off, in addition to an FM receiver so you can listen to your favourite stations, the player has a built-in FM transmitter, so you can become your own favourite station – no need to buy a separate component to send tunes to your car's FM radio.

More importantly, the player has built-in Wi-Fi, allowing the Aireo to double as a hotspot finder. Better, you can connect to the hotspot and wirelessly download content from sources like Audible.com, talk radio, or print sources, as long as you have a subscription. The player supports both WEP and WPA encryption, but you have to set up your keys on your PC ahead of time – not on the fly, sadly.

By Sean Carruthers

Questions and comments relating to the Wireless section, including Sean Carruthers' monthly column, can be sent to wireless@publishing.ca.

The Watch List

Nokia 7280 www.nokia.ca

Shaped more like a lipstick tube than a cell phone, Nokia's 7280 is the most radical phone redesign in quite some time. For the terminally vain, the screen doubles as a tiny mirror, and the top of the phone extends to reveal a tiny camera. The big challenge: the number pad has been replaced by a tiny jog wheel, so entering data takes a bit more time ... it's all about the address book.

Pricing and carrier to be determined, but don't expect it to be cheap.



Road warrior: laptop bag roundup

Notebooks aren't cheap, so the first step for road warriors is usually to find a bag that will adequately secure and protect their precious investment. But with many notebooks pushing the eight or even ten pound mark (not including power supply and other peripherals), an equally important factor to consider is ergonomics.

Laptop bags fall into four broad categories: totes or messenger bags, backpacks, bags on wheels, and a relatively new category of women's totes, which are essentially oversized purses with laptop compartments. HUB evaluated a number of bags of various types, styles and sizes – all of which were advertised as laptop bags although not all of them had the signature dedicated laptop compartment – focusing on the ergonomic features of the bag in addition to how well it protected the notebook.

Totes

Totes or messenger bags are meant to be held briefcase-style or slung across the shoulder. With a few exceptions (notably the Blacktop Standard and Icon), the totes were the lightest bags on average in our roundup.

Ergonomically speaking, buyers should look for a wide shoulder strap with a padded shoulder piece (preferably with breathable mesh or a rubber grip to prevent sliding off the shoulder), and should wear the strap slung across the entire body as opposed to hanging off of one shoulder. This distributes the weight a little more evenly; otherwise, shoulder and neck muscles on one side can become strained. Finally, you can also lift the bag with your hand to take some of the weight off the shoulders.

Targus Blacktop Standard

Price: \$69.99 **Size:** Up to 15.4"
Dimensions: 16"x15"x5" **Weight:** 1.6kg

Pros:

- Rubber shoulder grip
- Laptop is well-protected
- Adjustable Velcro strap to fit notebook so it won't slide around

Cons:

- Somewhat heavy



The Blacktop is more of a traditional business briefcase with space for the notebook and a few small accessories, and a removable pouch for things like an extra battery. The laptop is nicely protected by thick rubber treads that run along the bottom of the bag, and the perimeter is encased by hard foam. A Velcro dividing strip adjusts to hug the notebook, ensuring a secure fit for a variety of sizes up to 15.4 inches.

Hedgren Icon

Price: \$250 **Size:** up to 17"
Dimensions: 17"x12.5"x6.5" **Weight:** 2.5kg

Pros:

- Large capacity
- Pull-out plastic document sleeve
- Laptop well-protected

Cons:

- The heaviest tote tested
- Expensive



The Icon has numerous compartments and dividers, including a front pouch that holds pens, cards, and a cell phone. Its large capacity is offset by the added weight. It has a wide nylon shoulder strap with a foam shoulder pad. The laptop sits in a detachable zippered-off sleeve with hard leather outer shell and padding of thick foam and hard rubber studs.

Crumpler Skivvy

Price: S: \$71.99, M: \$74.99, L: \$77.99
Size: S: Up to 12", M: 14-15", L: 17"
Dimensions (L – as tested): 16"x14"x4" **Weight:** 0.5kg

Pros:

- Coolness factor high
- Comes in three sizes for best fit
- Extremely light

Cons:

- Not well padded
- No clasp to secure laptop from sliding around
- No padding on shoulder strap



Hip-looking yet barebones, the Skivvy has one zippered front pouch in addition to the main laptop pouch. The laptop compartment is large and roomy with medium-thick foam padding on all sides (though it's not all that well padded on the bottom). The shoulder strap is thin and nylon with no shoulder padding, making it not the most comfortable choice.

Samsonite Jolt Messenger Bag

Price: \$40 **Size:** Up to 13" **Weight:** 0.7kg

Pros:

- Breathable mesh on shoulder strap and handle
- Large, wide shoulder pad with ample padding

Cons:

- No clasp or cover to secure top of laptop pouch
- Thin padding with no extra padding on bottom



The Jolt has a small carrying capacity beyond the laptop, but does have front compartments for pens and a cell phone. It's comfortable thanks to a large, wide and padded shoulder pad constructed of breathable mesh. (Same goes for the handle.) Unfortunately, the nylon laptop pouch is only thinly padded, offering minimal to moderate protection.

Kensington Contour

Price: \$89.95 **Size:** Up to 15"
Dimensions: 16"x12.5"x4" **Weight:** 2.2kg

The Contour is part of Kensington's line of American Chiropractic Association-endorsed bags, and has such ergonomically-friendly features as a rubber-grip shoulder pad that curves to fit the contour of the shoulder, and a curved band to better accommodate the body. It's fairly spacious, with a plethora of pouches including pen and key holders. The

laptop fits into a snug pouch with thin foam covering on all sides, and is secured with a Velcro clasp.

Pros:

- Secure and padded laptop pouch
- Ergonomically-friendly

Cons:

- Fairly heavy



Backpacks

Wide, padded shoulder straps will distribute the weight more evenly, and a hip strap will take some of the weight off of the shoulders altogether. The backpack should sit at the lower back, with shoulder straps adjusted so that the bag fits the body snugly. If the bag extends beyond the lower back, the wearer will lean forward to compensate, thus stressing the back and shoulders.

APC TravelCase

Price: Approx. \$60 (from US\$49.99) **Size:** Up to 15"

Dimensions: 12"x14.5"x5" **Weight:** 1.4kg

Pros:

- Accommodates many gadgets
- Hip strap and shoulder cross-strap for additional weight distribution

Cons:

- Minimal laptop protection and no securing strap



The TravelCase contains six mesh pouches for carrying gadgets, including APC's Power Reader Adaptor for charging your laptop on the go – there's a hole in the lining for the very purpose of feeding the cable through into the laptop compartment.

There's no actual sleeve for the laptop to fit into; rather, it sits in between two dividers in the main part of the bag. There's no extra padding on the

bottom – just the bag's thin nylon outer material, minimal padding on the divider walls, and no strap to secure the notebook.

Crumpler Beer Back

Price: \$209.99 **Size:** Up to 17"

Dimensions: 12"x20"x8" **Weight:** 1.4kg

Pros:

- High security for contents
- Huge capacity
- Coolness factor high

Cons:

- Position of zipper makes quick access to bag contents difficult
- Pricey



The domed shape of the Beer Back results in a huge carrying capacity. The back is heavily padded and rigid, with padded wide shoulder straps and a hip strap. The design of the bag is such that the zipper is underneath the straps, making it quite awkward for quick access; the trade-off is that the bag's contents are very secure. The laptop is protected by a detachable pouch with moderate padding. It's a snug fit, and the pouch has a foldover lip secured by Velcro.

Mobile Edge Premium Backpack

Price: About \$110 (from US\$89.99) **Size:** Up to 17"

Dimensions: 16"x21"x9" **Weight:** 2kg

Pros:

- Breathable mesh on back
- Hip strap
- Laptop well-protected

Cons:

- No mesh on straps



The Premium Backpack has a detachable cell phone pouch that clips to the strap and a media pouch with headphone slot conveniently located at

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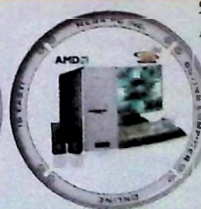
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the top of the backpack. The laptop is amply protected by a pouch with foam nodes on the sides, front, back and bottom, and secured by a Velcro strap.

Samsonite Ripple

Price: \$50 Size: Up to 17"

Dimensions: 13"x18"x9" Weight: 0.9kg

Pros:

- Light
- Breathable mesh on shoulder straps and back

Cons:

- Light padding on sides and almost no padding on bottom



Features include a media pouch with headphone hole located in the middle of the bag, and a front pouch for keys, cell phone, pens and cards. The laptop is secured by a Velcro clasp, but unfortunately there's almost no padding on the bottom and only light padding on the sides.

Kensington Contour Backpack

Price: \$99.99 Size: Up to 17"

Dimensions: 12"x18.5"x6" Weight: 1.5kg

Pros:

- Breathable mesh padded shoulder straps and back
- Ergonomically fits to curvature of spine

Cons:

- Lumbar support mechanism hugs hips - not ideal for larger people



The Contour Backpack is the only bag with an actual adjustable mechanism for optimal lumbar support. The plastic mold (encased within the fabric of the bag) can be set to one of four positions in order to fit the contours of the body by adjusting to the natural curvature of the spine. Adding to that padded mesh straps and a hip strap, the Contour Backpack has ergonomic considerations amply covered. The laptop is housed in a well-protected pouch with a Velcro clasp.

Rollers

Designed for the business traveller, these bags are on average far larger and heavier given that they're meant to accommodate documents, accessories, and even a change of clothes in some cases. The extra bulk is offset by the fact that they have wheels and are meant to be rolled along the ground. While the best solution ergonomically, they might obviously be overkill in a lot of situations.

Targus PORT Easy Roller

Price: \$199.99 Size: Up to 15"

Dimensions: 18.5"x16"x8.5" Weight: 4.3kg

Pros:

- Nifty green LED flashlight
- Huge rubber shock absorbers on bottom and sides

Cons:

- No foam on front and back



The Easy Roller features a ton of assorted pouches and pockets, including removable mesh ones for holding things like cards, cash and sunglasses, CD sleeves, and a nylon sleeve for holding documents. Another unexpected feature is a green mini LED flashlight attached by a drawstring. The zippered off laptop pouch has huge (two-inch) rubber shock absorbers on the bottom and sides, but unfortunately no foam on the front and back. The pouch is a relatively snug fit, and the laptop is secured by a Velcro clasp.

Kensington Contour Roller

Price: \$149.99 Size: Up to 17"

Dimensions: 16"x12.5"x8" Weight: 3.9kg

Pros:

- Ergonomic telescoping handle

Cons:

- Smaller notebooks will slide around



The spacious Counter Roller has more than 10 pouches and compartments, including an area beneath the front flap for holding pens, cards and keys. The laptop is secured in a removable foam pouch. Although secured with a Velcro strap, the fit isn't all that snug - smaller notebooks will slide. The telescoping handle extends to the highest level of all the roller bags tested.

Samsonite Mobile Office

Price: \$159.99 Size: Up to 17"

Dimensions: 17"x14"x9" Weight: 4.5kg

Pros:

- Well-organized compartments

Cons:

- The heaviest of the rollers tested



The Mobile Office doesn't mess around. It's both the largest and heaviest of the rollers, obviously designed for the travelling business person given that there's even a suitcase compartment with cross-straps for securing clothes, in addition to sleeves for books, magazines or documents, and pouches for cell phones and other accessories. As for laptop protection, smaller laptops (14-inches and lower) can be secured in a removable nylon bag with its own handle. Larger laptops can sit in the lightly padded nylon pouch with Velcro securing strap.

By Erin Bell

Check out next month's edition of HUB for a look at some laptop totes that are designed especially for women.

Break 1-9 for radio check

Anyone out there with their ears on?

Communication has been made infinitely more simple thanks to the advent of cell phones. Infinitely more annoying too, some would argue, as cell phone owners are always on-call. A new Bell initiative descriptively titled 10-4 aims to make communication that much more simple ... or annoying, depending which of the aforementioned viewpoints you subscribe to.

At the heart of 10-4 is a fairly old push-to-talk concept similar to citizen's band (CB), family radio service (FRS) and the more recent general mobile radio service (GMRS) recently sanctioned in Canada with none of the licensing fees our neighbours to the south have to pay. However, 10-4 operates over the 1X digital network, meaning that the quality of communications is dictated by the strength of the signal as opposed to the distance between receivers. It can also be used in either the 800MHz or 1.9GHz digital and 800MHz analogue bands as a regular phone.

Users can link up to four other subscribers to their list for unlimited 10-4 communications for one price, including long-distance communications. Business applications are an obvious fit for the service, but Bell suggests 10-4 as a good way for families to keep in touch on vacations and in general.

Upon receiving a 10-4 transmission, the phone will play a user-customizable tone. Incoming transmissions can still be ignored or refused and the person initiating communication can't speak until the call is accepted. Transmissions can be sent to one person at a time or broadcast to everyone in the user's group. In one-to-one communications, the Sanyo SCP-7300 tested can be used in much the same way as a walkie talkie. Users can call a phone on their list and speak back and forth with the clamshell folding 7300 closed. The secondary exterior screen will note when listening and when broadcasting, and a top-mounted light gives further visual clues. In our tests, communications over 10-4 were delayed by less than a second from transmission to reception. Since users can't talk over each other and are alerted to the fact that the other is speaking, this didn't prove to be an issue. Having to push a button to speak rather than simply speaking takes a little getting used to however.

Cell phone users interested in 10-4 service don't currently have a lot of options where handsets are concerned. They can either choose from the 7300 tested or wait a while for the announced but not yet available Sanyo 4920 model "coming soon."

Fortunately, the 7300 as tested is a decent phone. It seems robust and durable (in the admittedly limited time spent with it) and is a fairly no frills though colour screen tri-band phone.

While users may be accustomed to receiving at least one rudimentary game with a new cell phone, the 7300 comes with none. It is Java-enabled, however, so users can download games and applications at will if they're ready to pay up. Unfortunately – and this seems a major stumbling block for a supposedly always-on means of communication – we weren't alerted to incoming 10-4 transmissions when playing a game or using other applications on the phone. Even when just navigating menu systems the other handset received a "not available" notice when trying to make contact.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin



10-4 service

Bell Mobility

www.bell.ca/10-4

\$20 – \$30 per month per member
\$15 when added to an existing rate plan

Sanyo SCP-7300

www.sanyo.com

\$149.99 with three-year service contract through Bell

Dimensions: 94x50x28 mm (LxWxD)

Weight: 120 g

Battery: 1000 mAh Li-ion

Manufacturer: 3 hours / 4 days

supplied talk / standby time:



PSP impressions one month later

First impression: Man, it's shiny!

It's been a little over a month since Sony's PlayStation Portable (PSP) hit North America, and the frothy-mouthed geeky fervor that surrounds the launch of any new videogame console has had a chance to die down. One in-store exchange due to dead pixels and one frustrating experience with Sony technical support trying (and ultimately failing) to configure the PSP's WiFi capabilities later, I feel ready to take a look at the PSP in a more rational and less "omg, new gadget!" state of mind.

Like many people, what initially lured me to the PSP was the huge, mesmerizing screen. Movies literally look better on the PSP's widescreen high-definition display than they do on my television set. Combine this with the sleek all-black body and it's clear that the PSP is no kid's toy. Unlike the rugged clamshelled Nintendo DS and Game Boy Advance SP, the PSP wouldn't long survive being tossed around in a backpack or

dropped on the floor. (As an aside, a friend's GBA SP actually made a full recovery after accidentally falling into the toilet.)

The PSP, by contrast, gives off an aura of fussiness that encourages obsessive behaviour on the part of its owner, whether it's fastidiously polishing smudges off the unforgiving black veneer or fretting over the well-being of the screen. A carrying case is an

absolute must, and a hard-shell case is preferable. I even went as far as to buy a plastic PDA screen protector to ward off specs of dust.

So yeah, the PSP is sexy. But although history has proven that even the sexiest, most technologically advanced game consoles are dead in the water without proper software support, this doesn't seem to be an issue so far. The system shipped with an unprecedented 24 launch titles, and before the summer's over we'll see more games from major studios like Namco, Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, Konami, Buena Vista, Rockstar and Atari, in addition to at least 25 movies released on Sony's proprietary UMD disc format.

By Erin Bell

Second impression: Oops, I touched it. It's not so shiny anymore.

The PSP is certainly a slick device. Its 4.3-inch LCD screen is unprecedented in mobile video game units and almost unheard of even in video-specific devices. Playing games on the bright widescreen-format display is a coup. In fact, it's hard to go back to playing on the smaller and dimmer three-inch screen of the Nintendo DS or Game Boy Advance SP, though Nintendo's products are certainly more practical from a portability perspective. Both offer considerably longer battery life than does the PSP and both fold clamshell style, protecting the screen(s) in the process. By contrast, the PSP screen is completely exposed and requires users to give much more thought to keeping it pristine. While the PSP does offer a sleep feature that does an excellent job of conserving battery life and making it easy to game in instalments – an important feature for a mobile game system – actually putting it away until the next instalment is not a simple matter. The device can't be slipped into a pocket until next time. Rather, it has to be placed in the included protective sleeve or stashed in an after-market carrying case. It also feels fragile; while the plastic the PSP's guts reside in isn't flimsy or cheap-feeling, the rear-mounted UMD drive door feels overly delicate. It seems that one relatively small drop could destroy the PSP by either

PSP at a glance

Price:	\$199.99
Dimensions:	7.4 x 7.0 x 2.2 mm (WxHxD)
Weight:	260 g
CPU:	333MHz
Memory:	32MB
Display:	4.3-inch, 16:9 ratio TFT LCD 480x272 pixel, 300 nit/m2 max available when plugged in
Connections:	USB 2.0, IEEE 1394, iLink
Storage:	UMD drive, Memory Stick PRO Duo
Battery type / life:	Lithium-ion 3.6V 1800 mAh

Universal Media Disc (UMD) at a glance:

Dimensions:	65x65x12 mm (WxHxD)
Weight:	13 g
Capacity:	1.4GB single side, dual layer
Disk diameter:	60 mm



cracking the huge screen or ruining the fragile UMD drive door.

Similarly, battery life is a concern. The PSP offers an almost respectable six hours of gaming on a charge. When watching a movie – the PSP's second most oft-referred to application – the battery life plummets to just over three hours. The colossal screen is obviously going to place a drain on the battery. However, in using an optical disc format that requires periodic reading when playing games and constant reading when watching movies (read: mechanical parts) Sony has to make some concessions where battery life is concerned.

The issue of dead pixels has besmirched the PSP's colossal screen spec somewhat. The unit tested had a noticeable group of pixels stuck in the on position (i.e. white no matter what colour the surrounding pixels) in the lower left quadrant. It's an annoyance and a distraction when playing games and a bigger distraction when watching a movie. It's also a cardinal sin in relatively small LCD screens.

Growing pains aside, once you've played a game or watched a movie on the huge screen with near-PlayStation 2 quality graphics and audio, it's hard not to fall in love. The PSP also plays music in MP3 and Sony's own ATRAC3 format, and can display home or ripped movies with a little finagling and a large format Memory Stick Duo PRO card (sold separately at a mark up) and still pictures. Other functions like Web browsing, email and organization have been discussed as possibility but not yet formally announced.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

Questions and comments relating to the Total Gamer section, including this article, can be sent to totalgamer@pubpublishing.ca.



For \$299.99, the standard PSP bundle pack comes with a 32MB Memory Stick PRO Duo, headphones with volume control, AC adaptor, soft case, cleaning cloth and white leather wrist strap.

Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade

Publisher / Developer: Sony Online Entertainment

Borrowing heavily from such dungeon crawling adventures as *Diablo* and *Baldur's Gate*, *Dark Alliance*, *Untold Legends* leaves no stone unturned in its quest to exploit every hack 'n' slash cliché in the book.

After choosing one of four stereotypical fantasy character classes, you are appointed the official town hero and told to investigate a spider infestation that of course is really just the first sign of a much greater evil that threatens the land.

Using the town as a central base, you venture forth into the catacombs beneath the city and into the lands beyond, battling fell beasts, activating magic portals, collecting potions and trinkets, and scavenging ever better equipment for your character – armor with +10 attribute bonuses and weapons with names like *Dependable Dagger of Flame Strike*.

Then, it's back to the town to heal, sell off excess loot, and restock items before accepting new quests and going back out to explore the seemingly endless network of dungeons.



The detailed graphics and smooth movements (for the most part) are a beauty to behold on the PSP, although traipsing through the randomly-generated dungeons can get a bit mind-numbing after a while.

By Erin Bell

INFO BOX

- Co-operative mode
- Lots of different weapons and armour

- Generic, unimpaired
- Limited character customization



Take for what it is: Mindless, repetitive fun.

Lumines

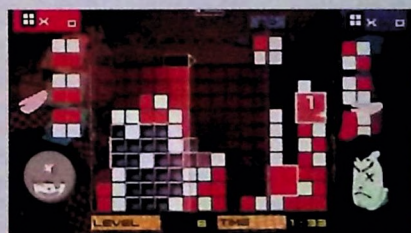
Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: Q Entertainment

As *Tetris* was to the original Game Boy system, *Lumines* hopes to be to the PSP. The gameplay style is similar between the two titles: blocks drop, players line them up to score points, clear up the board and advance to the next level. However, where *Tetris* players must concern themselves primarily with geometry, *Lumines* has players thinking about colour, lining up blocks in no less than a 2x2 same-colour pattern. Another twist on the classic's gameplay is a sweeping score line, getting better than a 2x6 block pattern is a very difficult feat. Instead, combos are tallied in passes of the score line. All blocks cleared within a pass are scored together.

Speaking of scores, thanks to the roughly 1.8GB of space available on the PSP's Universal Media Disc (UMD), developers have the opportunity to cram in large amounts of CD-quality music. *Lumines* doesn't disappoint and the music that accompanies the game is almost as

compelling as the gameplay itself. If you're thinking about jumping on the PSP train, *Lumines* is probably the best suited to mobile play and the most accessible title currently available to attach.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin



INFO BOX

- Awesome musical score
- Simple yet addictive concept

- Computer opponents maybe too challenging
- Too addictive?



Arguably the best PSP launch title.

Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30

Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: Gearbox Platform: Xbox

Brothers in Arms actually manages to distinguish itself from the glut of World War II-themed shooters already on the market, which is no small feat. Aside from an innovative system of controlling squad members, the game's other main selling point is its impressive historical accuracy.

The story follows the reluctant leader Sgt. Matt Baker (based on a real-life character) and his squad of paratroopers as they are sent into German-occupied France to weaken enemy forces in the days leading up to the Allied D-Day invasion.

The gameplay scenarios are based on actual after-engagement reports, and the Texas-based developers went to France for extensive on-location research, which enabled them to recreate settings down to the last building and hedge.

Sgt. Baker commands a squad of men divided into sniper, assault and armor [tank] specialists. In addition to controlling Baker from a first-person perspective, you're also responsible for directing the men in the squad and planning strategies to outflank and suppress enemies.



Brothers in Arms does occasionally flip-flop between realism and "game logic." There are no health replenishment items, but if a squad member is killed, he respawns at the beginning of the next chapter. There is also the occasional invis-

ble barrier and several glitches, at least one of which was so severe that there was no choice but to reset.

However, aside from a few quirks, realism does win out — you'll hear the panicked cries of your comrades as you run through an open field with mortars crashing down around you, and experience the panic caused by the agonizingly long re-load times of your authentically antiquated rifles.

Brothers in Arms communicates the disarray and frustration of being a soldier dropped into the thick of battle with no orders except to survive and make it to the next objective, retaking territory one road, church and bridge at a time. The subject matter is not sugar-coated, nor glorified or ramped up for a videogame audience. Given the meticulousness with which Gearbox researched its subject, Brothers in Arms could almost be called "edutainment" — though without all the lameness generally associated with that label.

By Erin Bell

INFO BOX

- ★ Historically accurate
- ★ Many unlockables and modes of difficulty
- ★ Some significant glitches
- ★ It's nice to see WWII treated with respect, especially given that many of its participants are still alive.

Donkey Kong Jungle Beat

Publisher / Developer: Nintendo Platform: GameCube

Whack, smack, clap, repeat. It may not sound terribly compelling but when this is a control scheme rather than a means to keep time in the scrolling music games, it is.

Nintendo's Namco-designed bongo peripheral is put to use in DK Jungle Beat. Left and right movement is accomplished by bashing the appropriate drum, jumping requires that both drums are hit at the same time and item collection and special actions like grabbing on to a swinging rope or firing



the game's namesake Donkey Kong out of a cannon or similar requires gamers to clap.

At its heart, the gameplay is incredibly simple: collect bananas scattered along the way while defeating fairly weak foes for same. At the end of each stage, bananas are counted and at the end of a level (consisting of two stages and a boss battle) a total is tallied. Achieving Bronze or Silver ranking is fairly easily accomplished. However, as gamers become more adept at the unique control input and



start to understand some of the mechanics of the level design, they can start stringing together combos to boost the number of bananas collected, achieving Gold or even Platinum rating on the levels.

Combos are counted up for as long as DK stays off the ground.

The challenge is found in trying to stay airborne for as long as possible, planning moves split seconds in advance and executing them. The game is fairly forgiving and the path to take for maximum collection is generally fairly apparent. To a gamer with any experience in classic platform game level design, DK Jungle Beat offers up a challenge but by no means an insurmountable one, which brings up perhaps the game's biggest shortcoming. Once players get the hang of controlling DK with the bongo drums, the game is easily completed, and with full levels lasting around eight minutes (give or take) and with less than 20 levels available, the game is over far too soon. Even completing all kingdoms to the platinum level, while it offers some replay value, isn't a difficult task once gamers have the hang of the control scheme.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

INFO BOX

- ★ Innovative control scheme
- ★ Excellent boss battles
- ★ Rewarding gameplay
- ★ Too short
- ★ Fairly easy
- ★ An interesting take on platforming and definitely worth checking out.

Cold Fear

Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: Darkworks Platform: PS2, Xbox, PC

The "survival horror" genre is choked with the bloated corpses of lesser games. They litter the battlefield like the dispatched zombies, mean-spirited dogs and scuttling insect-like creatures that are the genre's mainstays.

Cold Fear fares better than most games in the genre. However, the new and lofty standard set by Capcom's Resident Evil 4, against which other survival horror titles must now be measured, proves too much for the game to overcome.

Taking on the role of US Coastguard Tom Hansen, players are sent out to investigate some strange goings on aboard a fishing boat out at sea. It turns out, as is often the case in games of its ilk, that there's a government conspiracy afoot and little brain-boring and mind-controlling insects (called ExoCels in this case) have run amok, infecting the crew.

What differentiates Cold Fear from the current crop of survival horror titles is its setting, which proves to be both the best, and in some ways, the worst thing about the game. Best because the close-quarters nature of a



fishing boat heightens the suspense, worst because the game relies heavily on backtracking with little room for true exploration. Eventually, gamers will make it off the first boat and onto other ocean-bound but equally repetitive vessels. The fact that players have no in-game map to consult adds insult to injury.

Most of the action takes place on either the outer decks — while leaning to and fro on the listing boat, avoiding sweeping waves that would pull you out to sea, navigating the swinging boat gear and meeting a few well hidden baddies waiting to pounce — and inside the boat

with the same enemies and listing but minus the waves.

Enemies in Cold Fear don't walk with the ambling zombie gate common in the genre. Instead, they're on you like a shot and aren't overly easy to dispatch. Also, as an added bonus for fans of visceral gore, enemies aren't really dead until the ExoCels still hiding inside their skulls have either been ground under foot or blasted out.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

INFO BOX

Over the shoulder view option
Well-paced

Repetitive environments
Sometimes-predictable story



A safe bet for true survival horror fans but it won't win any new fans to the genre.

Doom 3

Publisher: Activision Developer: Id Software / Vicarious Visions Platform: Xbox

If your PC wasn't up to the Herculean task of running Doom 3 when it came out last summer, don't despair. In conjunction with the release of the Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil expansion pack for PC, Activision has also released Doom 3 on Xbox to give console owners a taste of the gory first-person shooter.

Doom 3 clearly pushes the envelope of what current-generation console hardware is capable of, and the Xbox is up to the task. With breathtaking light and shadow effects, seamless gameplay and nary a hiccup or glitch, Doom 3 is truly a technical masterpiece.

As a Marine fighting to stay alive on UAC's Mars base, which has become overrun by a malevolent alien presence, you'll spend a great deal of your time mowing down various grotesque baddies using an impressive arsenal of weapons.

Button-mapping weapons to the Xbox controller's D-pad for switching on the fly works fairly well, although subbing additional weapons in and out

involves the rather cumbersome process of accessing the Settings tab from the main menu. Doom 3 regularly strays into the territory of survival horror, with imagery that is stark and disturbing coupled with a



compelling atmosphere. Traversing the corridors of the gloomy, claustrophobic Mars base results in sensory overload at times, as enemies burst out of the darkness, lights flicker on and off and the air fills with garbled radio transmissions, frantic whispering and creepy

laughter — rendered in Dolby Digital surround sound for those lucky enough to have the setup.

Whether in the heat of combat or during the down time of exploration, the game frequently tosses out dynamic elements to throw you for a loop. The first time the Pinky enemy appears, for example, it spies you through an office window and tries to get at you by breaking down the door as you watch the metal bend and strain with each blow. Then the Pinky gives up on that, comes back around and simply crashes through the window!

Doom 3 is often scary, but it relies too heavily on straightforward combat and fire-fights to sustain the unsettling, helpless survival horror vibe perfected in games like Silent Hill. However, the series is no worse off for sticking to its FPS roots. Whether on PC or Xbox, Doom 3 is one heck of an experience.

By Erin Bell

INFO BOX

Intense, immersive atmosphere
Technically amazing

Plot is nothing special
Must access main menu to sub weapons into quick-load



Best played with the lights off and the surround sound cranked.



Yoshi Touch & Go

Publisher / Developer: Nintendo
ESRB: Everyone Platform: Nintendo DS
Star rating: 3

Yoshi Touch & Go is another game that showcases the killy things you can do with the DS stylus and microphone. There are only two stages. In the first, Baby Mario floats down from the sky and you must draw clouds with the stylus to guide him towards coins and away from danger. Baby Mario then "lands" on Yoshi's back, and Yoshi makes forward strides to reach another platformer-type level. Your job is to plan a safe path for Yoshi by drawing clouds to steer him, drawing bubbles around enemies to crush them, or making Yoshi lay eggs at enemies and for-ward coins by tapping the screen.

The challenge in the randomly-generated stages is to achieve the highest score possible in each of the four modes. Achieve the highest score in a time amount of time in Score Attack, record the longest possible distance traveled in Endless Mode, or shoot the enemies who stole Baby Luigi as fast as possible in Time Attack. In Challenge mode, extra seconds can be added to the timer by shooting enemies and collecting coins. The concept is overly simplistic for a platformer, but works if you think of it as a puzzle game.

By Eric Bell

Good

Interesting and unique use of the stylus in order to draw clouds and the microphone to blow them away.

Bad

The walking stage is much more fun than the floating one.

Final thought

The concept is shallow, but it does work well as a puzzle game.



Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

Publisher: Nokia Developer: Camelot Platform: N-Gage



The gruff secret agent Sam Fisher is making another sneak attack on Nokia's N-Gage game deck. Where previously he was only available in two dimensions on the handheld platform, this time he's rendered in the style of original PlayStation 3D graphics. However, where previous 3D attempts have choked the N-Gage, Chaos Theory plays relatively smoothly.

Gamers will go through Fisher's usual bag of tricks: sneaking up on guards then interrogating and / or incapacitating them, using night and thermal vision where appropriate, eavesdropping on sensitive conversations, passing cameras undetected and sniping enemies. However, one very key gameplay element in particular is missing: Gamers can't shoot out lights and instead must rely on existing shadows to remain undetected.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

INFO BOX

-Well done mobile 3D
-Number pad allows for numerous assignments

-Vertical screen a hindrance
-Entirely manual camera



An impressive mobile experience.

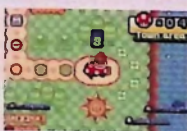
Mario Party Advance

Publisher / Developer: Nintendo Platform: Game Boy Advance

The fact that Mario Party is up to its sixth console version attests to the popularity of the long-standing series, with its board game layout and fun multiplayer mini-games. It's therefore surprising that Nintendo should choose to make the first Mario Party for a portable system primarily a single-player adventure.

There's still a familiar game board, but you now navigate it alone as either Mario, Luigi, Peach or Yoshi, and fulfill particular quests in order to win mini-games and "gadgets" to play outside of the story mode.

The mini-games (of which there are more than 100) are mediocre and illogically organized. The majority of them are single-player while some are multiplayer using either one or two game paks; some involve passing the same GBA back and forth, and some are for two to four players all using different buttons of the same GBA - a



concept that is dubious at best for anyone with post-pubescent-sized hands.

Many of the gadgets are similar in concept to mini-games, like a Mini Soccer game that doesn't even keep score, or a goomba sumo wrestling game. Others are just applications, some of which are interesting (such as a morse code translator that renders your inputted text as morse code beeps), and others of which are useless (such as Lip Synch, where you control Mario's mouth opening and closing.)

While the single player mode is alright on its own, the overall package is lacking.

By Erin Bell

INFO BOX

-Single player mode somewhat enjoyable
-Trade gadgets with friends

-Annoying music
-Lame gadgets and mini-games



It's Mario alright, but the Party part is missing.

Coming
Soon!

n-gage.ca

TOM CLANCY'S

SPLINTER CELL

CHAOS THEORY

AS THE ENEMY EVOLVES,
SO MUST YOU.

solo mode

co-operative mode




game



N-GAGE
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The gamer's phone

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